THE LOVELY LADY

MARY AUSTIN

THE LOVELY LADY

By the same author

A Woman of Genius
The Arrow Maker
The Green Bough
Christ in Italy

"It was one thin web of rose and gold over lakes of burnished light . . . ."

THE LOVELY LADY

By Mary Austin

Frontispiece by Gordon Grant

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To

J. AND E.

THE COMPANIONS OF THE GONDOLA

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IN WHICH PETER MEETS A DRAGON, AND THE LOVELY LADY MAKES HER APPEARANCE

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IN WHICH PETER MEETS A DRAGON, AND THE LOVELY LADY MAKES HER APPEARANCE

I

THE walls of the Wonderful House rose up straight and shining, pale greenish gold as the slant sunlight on the orchard grass under the apple trees; the windows that sprang arching to the summer blueness let in the scent of the cluster rose at the turn of the fence, beginning to rise above the dusty smell of the country roads, and the evening clamour of the birds in Bloomsbury wood. As it dimmed and withdrew, the shining of the walls came out more clearly. Peter saw then that they were all of coloured pictures wrought flat upon the gold, and as the glow of it increased they began to swell and stir like a wood waking. They leaned out from the walls, looking all one way toward the in-

creasing light and tap-tap of the Princess' feet along the halls.

"Peter, oh, Peter!"

The tap-tapping grew sharp and nearer like the sound of a crutch on a wooden veranda, and the voice was Ellen's.

"Oh, Peter, you are always a-reading and a-reading!"

Peter rolled off the long settle where he had been stretched and put the book in his pocket apologetically.

"I was just going to quit," he said; "did you want anything, Ellen?"

"The picnic is coming back; I thought we could go down to the turn to meet them. Mrs. Sibley said she would save me some things from the luncheon."

If there was a little sting to Peter in Ellen's eagerness, it was evidence at least, how completely he and his mother had kept her from realizing that it was chiefly because of their not being able to afford the well-filled basket demanded by a Bloombury picnic that they had not accepted the invitation. Ellen had thought it was because Bet, the mare, could not

be spared all day from the ploughing nor Peter from hoeing the garden, and her mother was too busy with the plaid gingham dress she was making for the minister's wife, to do any baking. It meant to Ellen, the broken fragments of the luncheon, just so much of what a picnic should mean: the ride in the dusty morning, swings under the trees, easy games that she could play, lemonade, pails and pails of it, pink ham sandwiches and frosted cake; and if Ellen could have any of these, she was having a little piece of the picnic. What it would have meant particularly to Peter over and above a day let loose, the arching elms, the deep fern of Bloombury wood, might have been some passages, perhaps, which could be taken home and made over into the groundwork of new and interesting adventures in the House from which Ellen had recalled him. There was a girl with June apple cheeks and bright brown eyes at that picnic, who could have given points to princesses.

He followed the tapping of his sister's crutch along the thick, bitter smelling dust of the road, rising more and more heavily as the dew

gathered, until they came to the turn by the cluster rose and heard below them on the bridge, the din of the wheels and the gay laughter of the picnickers.

"Hi, Peter!"

"Hello, Ellen!"

"Awful sorry you couldn't come . . . had a bully time. . . . Killed a copperhead and two water snakes."

"Here, Ellen, catch ahold of this!"

And while she was about it the June apple girl leaned over the end-board of the wagon, and spoke softly to Peter.

"We're going over to Harvey's pasture next Wednesday afternoon, berrying, in the Democrat wagon with our team; Jim Harvey's going to drive. We made it up to-day. Surely you can get away for an afternoon?" That was what the voice said. "To be with me," the eyes added.

"I don't know. . . . I'd like it. . . ."

It was not altogether the calculation as to how much earlier he would have to get up that morning to be able to take an hour off in the afternoon, that made Peter hesitate, but the

sudden swimming of his senses about the point of meeting eyes. "I'll tell you what," he said, "you come by for Ellen, and I'll walk over about four and ride home with you."

"Oh," said the girl; she did not know quite whether to triumph at having gained so much or to be disappointed at so little. "I'll be expecting you."

The horses creaked forward in the harness, the dust puffed up from under the wheels and drowned the smell of the wilding rose, it fell thick on the petals and a little on Peter's spirit, too, as he followed Ellen back to the house, though it never occurred to him to think any more of it than that he had been working too long in the hot sun and was very tired. It did not, however, prevent his eating his share of the picnic dainties as he sat with his mother and Ellen on the veranda. Then as the soft flitter of the bats' wings began in the dusk, he kissed them both and went early up to bed.

Peter's room was close under the roof and that was close under the elm boughs; all hours he could hear them finger it with soft rustling touches. The bed was pulled to

the window that gave upon the downslope of the hill; at the foot of it one saw the white bloom-faces of the alders lift and bow above the folded leaves, and the rising of the river damp across the pastures. All the light reflected from the sky above Bloombury wood was no more than enough to make a glimmer on the glass of a picture that hung at the foot of Peter's bed. It served to show the gilt of the narrow frame and the soft black of the print upon which Peter had looked so many times that he thought now he was still seeing it as he lay staring in the dusk — a picture of a young man in bright armour with loosened hair, riding down a particularly lumpy and swollen dragon. Flames came out of the creature's mouth in the immemorial fashion of dragons, but the young man was not hurt by them. He sat there lightly, his horse curvetting, his lance thrust down the dragon's throat and coming out of the back of his head, doing a great deed easily, the way people like to think of great things being done. It was a very narrow picture, so narrow that you might think that it had something to do with the dragon's doubling on

himself and the charger's forefeet being up in the air to keep within the limits of the frame, and the exclusion from it of the Princess whom, as his father had told him the story, the young knight George had rescued from those devouring jaws. It came out now, quite clearly, that she must have had cheeks as red as June apples and eyes like the pools of spring rain in Bloombury wood, and her not being there in the picture was only a greater security for her awaiting him at this moment in the House with the Shining Walls.

There was, for the boy still staring at it through the dusk, something particularly personal in the picture, for ever since his father had died, three years ago, Peter had had a dragon of his own to fight. Its name was Mortgage. It had its lair in Lawyer Keplinger's office, from which it threatened twice yearly to come out and eat up his mother and Ellen and the little house and farm, and required to have its mouth stopped with great wads of interest which took all Peter's laborious days to scrape together. This year, however, he had hopes, if the garden turned out well, of

lopping off a limb or a claw of the dragon by way of a payment on the principal, which somehow seemed to bring the Princess so much nearer, that as Peter lay quite comfortably staring up at the glimmer on the wall, the four gold lines of the frame began to stretch up and out and the dark block of the picture to recede until it became the great hall of a palace again, and there was the Princess coming toward him in a golden shimmer.

There was just such another glow on the afternoon when Peter walked over to the berrying and came up with the apple-cheeked girl whose name was Ada, a good half mile from the others. As they climbed together over uneven ground she gave him her hand to hold, and there was very little to say and no need of saying it until they came to the hill overlooking the pasture, yellowing toward the end of summer, full of late bloom and misty colour passing insensibly into light. Threads of gossamer caught on the ends of the scrub or floated free, glinting as they turned and bellied in the windless air, to trick the imagination with the hint of robed, invisible presences.

"Oh, Peter, don't you wish it would stay like this always?"

"Like this," Peter gave her hand the tiniest squeeze to show what there was about this that he would like to keep. "It's just as good to look at any season though," he insisted. "I was here hunting rabbits last winter, in February, and you could find all sorts of things in the runways where the brambles bent over and kept off the snow; bunches of berries and coloured leaves, and little green fern, and birds hopping in and out."

Ada spread her skirts as she sat on a flat boulder and began sticking leaves into Peter's hat.

"Peter, what are you going to do this winter?"

"I don't know, I should like to go over to the high school at Harmony, but I suppose I'll try to get a place to work near home."

"We've been getting up a dancing and singing school, to begin in October. The teacher is coming from Dassonville. It will be once a week; we sing for an hour and then have dancing. It will be cheap as cheap — only two dollars a month. I hope you can come."

"I don't know; I'll think about it." He was thinking then that two dollars did not sound much, but when you come to subtract it from the interest it was a great deal, and then there would be Ellen to pay for, and perhaps a dress for her, and dancing shoes for himself and singing books. And no doubt at the dances there would be basket suppers.

"I should think you could come if you wanted to. Jim Harvey's getting it up. . . . He wants to keep company with me this winter." Ada was a little nervous about this, but as she stole a glance at Peter's face as he lay biting at a stem of grass, she grew quite comfortable again. "But I don't know as I will," she said. "I don't care very much for Jim Harvey."

Peter picked up a stone and shied it joyously at a thrush in the bushes.

"And I don't know as I want you to," he declared boldly. "I'll come to that dancing school if I possibly can, Ada, and if I can't you'll know it isn't because I don't wish to."

"You must want to with all your might and that'll make it come true. You can wish it on my amethyst ring."

"You won't take it off until October, Ada?"

"I truly won't." And it took Peter such a long time to get the ring on and held in place while the wish was properly made, that it was practically no time at all until the others found them on the way home as they came laughing up the hill.

As it happened, however, Peter did not get to the dancing school once that winter. The first of the cold spell Ellen had slipped on the ice, to the further trying of her lame back, and there were things to be done to it which the doctor said could not possibly be put off, so it happened that the mortgage dragon did not get his payment and Peter gave up the high school to get a place in Greenslet's grocery at Bloombury. And since there were the books to be made up after supper, and as Bet, the mare, after being driven in the delivery wagon all day, could not be let stand half the night in the cold at the schoolhouse door, it turned out that Peter had not been once to the dancing school. In the beginning he had done something for himself in the way of a hall for dancing, thrown out from the House of the Shining

Walls, in which he and the Princess Ada, to lovely, soundless strains, had whirled away, and found occasion to say things to each other such as no ballroom could afford; — bright star pointed occasions which broke and scattered before the little hints of sound that crept up the stair to advise him that Ellen was stifling back the pain for fear of waking him. They had moved Ellen's bed downstairs as a way of getting on better with the possibility of her being bedridden all that winter, and the tiny whispered moan recalled him to the dread that as the half yearly term came around, what with doctor's bills and delicacies, the mortgage dragon would have not even his sop of interest, and remain whole and threatening as before.

When Ellen was able to sit up in bed the mother moved her sewing in beside it. Then Peter would sit on the other side of the lamp with a book, and the walls of the House rose up from its pages gilded finely, and the lights would come out and the dancing begin, but before he could get more than a word with the Princess, he would hear Ellen:

"Peter, oh, Peter! I wish you wouldn't be

always with your nose in a book. I wish you would talk sometimes."

"What about, Ellen?"

"Oh, Peter, you are the *worst.* I should think you would take some interest in things."

"What sort of things?" Peter wished to know.

"Why, who comes in the store, and what they say, and everything."

"Mrs. Sleason wanted us to open a kit of mackerel to see if she'd like it," began Peter literally, "and we persuaded her to take two cans of sardines instead. Does that interest you?"

"Have you sold any of the blue tartan yet?"

"Ada Brown bought seven yards of it."

"Oh, Peter! And trimmings?"

"Six yards of black velvet ribbon — yes, I forgot — Mrs. Blackman is to make it up for her. I heard Mrs. Brown say she would call for the linings."

"She's having it made up for Jim Harvey's birthday," Ellen guessed shrewdly. "He's twenty-one, you know. . . . People say she's engaged to him."

Peter felt the walls of the House which had

stood out waiting for him during this interlude, fall inward into the gulf of blackness. Nobody said anything for two or three ticks of the large kitchen clock, and then Ellen burst out:

"I think she's a nasty, flirty, stuck-up *thing;* that's what I think!"

"Shs — hss! Ellen," said her mother.

"Peter," demanded Ellen, "are you reading again?"

"I beg your pardon, Ellen." Peter did not know that he had turned a page.

"Don't you ever wish for anything for yourself, Peter? Don't you wish you were rich?"

"No, Ellen, I don't know that I ever do."

But as the winter got on and the news of Ada Brown's engagement was confirmed, he must have wished it a great many times.

One evening late in January he was sitting with his mother very quietly by the kitchen stove, the front of which was opened to throw out the heat; there was the good smell of the supper in the room, for though he had a meal with the Greenslets at six, his mother always made a point of having something hot for him when he came in from bedding down the mare,

and the steam of it on the window-panes made dull smears of the reflected light. The shade of the lamp was drawn down until the ceiling of the room was all in shadow save for the bright escape from the chimney which shone directly overhead, round and yellow as twenty dollars, and as Peter leaned back in his chair, looking up, it might have been that resemblance which gave a turn to his thoughts and led him to say to his mother:

"Why did my father never get rich?"

"I hardly know, Peter. He used to say that he couldn't afford it. There were so many other things he wished to do; and I wished them, too. When we were young we did them together. Then your father was the sort of man who always gave too much and took too little. I remember his saying once that no one who loved his fellowman very much, *could* get rich."

"Do you wish he had?"

"I don't know that either. No, not if he was happier the way he was. And we *were* happy. Things would have come out all right if it hadn't been for the accident when the

thresher broke, and his being ill so long afterward. And my people weren't so kind as they might have been. You see, they always thought him a little queer. Before we were married, before we were even engaged, he had had a little money. It had been left him, and instead of investing it as anybody in Bloomsbury would, he spent it in travel. I remember his saying that his memories of Italy were the best investment he could have made. But afterward, when he was in trouble, they threw it up to him. We had never got in debt before . . . and then just as he was getting round, he took bronchitis and died."

She wiped her eyes quietly for a while, and the kettle on the stove began to sing soothingly, and presently Peter ventured:

"Do you wish I would get rich?"

"Yes, Peter, I do. We are all like that, I suppose, we grown-ups. Things we manage to get along without ourselves, we want for our children. I hope you will be a rich man some day; but, Peter, I don't want you to think it a reflection on your father that he wasn't. He had what he thought was best. He might

have left me with more money and fewer happy memories — and that is what women value most, Peter; — the right sort of women. There are some who can't get along without *things:* clothes, and furniture, and carriages. Ada Brown is that kind; sometimes I'm afraid Ellen is a little. She takes after my family."

"It is partly on account of Ellen that I want to get rich."

"You mustn't take it too hard, Peter; we've always got along somehow, and nobody in Bloombury is very rich."

Peter turned that over in his mind the whole of a raw and sleety February. And one day when nobody came into the store from ten till four, and loose winds went in a pack about the village streets, casting up dry, icy dust where now and then some sharp muzzle reared out of the press as they turned the corners, he spoke to Mr. Greenslet about it. It was so cold that day that neither the red apples in the barrels nor the crimson cranberries nor the yellowing hams on the rafters could contribute any appearance of warmth to the interior of the grocery. A kind of icy varnish of cold overlaid

the gay lables of the canned goods; the remnants of red and blue tartan exposed for sale looked coarse-grained with the cold, and cold slips of ribbons clung to the glass of the cases like the tongues of children tipped to the frosted panes. Even the super-heated stove took on a purplish tinge of chilblains, roughed by the wind.

A kind of arctic stillness pervaded the place, out of which the two men hailed each other at intervals as from immeasurable deeps of space.

"Mr. Greenslet," ventured Peter at last, "are you a rich man?"

"Not by a long sight."

"Why?" questioned Peter.

"Not built that way."

The grocer lapsed back into the silence and seemed to lean against it meditatively. The wolf wind howled about the corners and cast snow like powdered glass upon the windows contemptuously, and time went by with a large deliberate movement like a fat man turning over, before Peter hailed again.

"Did you ever want to be?"

Mr. Greenslet reached out for the damper of

the stove ostensibly to shake down the ashes, but really to pull himself up out of the soundless spaces of thought.

"When I was your age, yes. Thought I was going to be." The shaking of the damper seemed to loosen the springs of speech in him. "I was up in the city working for Siegel Brothers; began as a bundle boy and meant to be one of the partners. But by the time I worked up to fancy goods I realized that I would have to be as old as Methuselah to make it at that rate. And Mrs. Greenslet didn't like the city; she was a Bloombury girl. It wasn't any place for the children."

"So you came back?"

"We had saved a little. I bought out this place and put in a few notions I'd got from Siegel's. I'm comfortably off, but I'm not rich."

"Would you like to be?"

"I don' know, I don' know. I'd like to give the boys a better start than I had, but I'm my own boss here and one of the leading men. That's always something."

Peter went and looked out of the smudged

windows while he considered this. The long scrapes of the wind in the loose snow were like the scratches of great claws. It was now about mail time and a few people began to stir in the street; the clear light and the cold gave them a poverty-bitten look.

"Does anybody ever get rich in Bloombury?"

"Not that I know of. There's Mr. Dassonville in Harmony — Dave Dassonville, the richest man in these parts."

"I suppose he could tell me how to go about it?"

"I suppose he would if he knows. Mostly these things just happen."

Peter did not say anything more just then; he was watching a man and a girl of about his own age who had come out of a frame house farther down the street. The young man was walking so as to shield her from the wind, her rosy cheek was at his shoulder, and she smiled up at him over her muff, from dark, bright eyes.

"What's set you on to talk about riches? Thinking of doing something in that line yourself?"

"Yes," said Peter, kicking at the baseboard with his toes. "I don't know how it is to be done, but I've got to be rich. I've just simply got to."

II

It was along in the beginning of spring on a day full of wet cloud and clearing wind, that Peter walked over to Harmony to inquire of Mr. David Dassonville the way to grow rich. It was Sunday afternoon and the air sweet with the sap adrip from the orchards lately pruned and the smell of the country road dried to elasticity by the winds of March.

Between timidity and the conviction that a week day would have been better suited to his business, he drew on to the place of his errand very slowly, for he was sore with the raking of the dragon's claws, and unrested. It had been a terrible scrape to get together the last instalment of interest, and since Ellen had shattered it with the gossip about Ada Brown's engagement, there had been no House with Shining Walls for Peter to withdraw into out of the

dragon's breath of poverty; above all, no Princess.

He did not know where the House had come from any more than he knew now where it had gone. It was a gift out of his childhood to his shy, unfriended youth, but he understood that if ever its walls should waver and rise again to enclose his dreams, there would be no Princess. Never any more. Princesses were for fairy tales; girls wanted Things. There was his mother too — he had wished so to get her a new dress this winter. It was an ache to him to cut off yards and yards of handsome stuffs at Mr. Greenslet's, and all the longing in the world had not availed to get one of them for his mother. Plainly the mastery of Things was accomplished by being rich; he was on his way to Mr. Dassonville to find out how it was done.

It was quite four of the clock when he paused at the bottom of the Dassonville lawn to look up at the lace curtains at the tall French windows. Nobody in Bloombury was rich enough to have lace curtains at all the windows, and the boy's spirit rose at the substantial evidence of being at last fairly in the track of his desire.

He found Mr. Dassonville willing to receive him in quite a friendly way, sitting in his library, keeping the place with his finger in the book he had been reading to his wife. Peter also found himself a little at a loss to know how to begin in the presence of this lady, for he considered it a matter quite between men, but suddenly she looked up and smiled. It came out on her face fresh and delicately as an apple orchard breaking to bloom, and besides making it quite spring in the room, discovered in herself a new evidence of the competency of Mr. David Dassonville to advise the way of riches. She looked fragile and expensive as she sat in her silken shawl, her dark hair lifted up in a half moon from her brow, her hands lying in her lap half-covered with the lace of her sleeves, white and perfect like twin flowers. He saw rings flashing on the one she lifted to motion to the maid to bring a chair.

"If you have walked over from Bloombury you must be tired," she said, "and chilled, perhaps. Come nearer the fire."

"No, thank you," Peter had managed, "I am quite warm," as in fact he was, and a little

flushed. He sat down provisionally on the edge of the chair and looked at Mr. Dassonville.

"I came on business. I don't know if you will mind its being Sunday, but I couldn't get away from the store on other days."

"Quite right, quite right." Mr. Dassonville had lost his place in the book and laid it on his knee. "Private business? My dear, perhaps——"

"Oh, no — no," protested Peter handsomely. "I'd rather she stayed. It isn't. At least . . . I don't know if you will consider it private or not."

"Go on," urged Mr. Dassonville.

"I just came to ask you," Peter explained, "if you don't mind telling me, how you got rich?"

"But bless you, young man," exclaimed Mr. Dassonville, "I'm not rich."

This for a beginning, was, on the face of it, disconcerting. Peter looked about at the rows of books, at the thick, soft carpet and the leather-covered furniture, and at the rings on Mrs. Dassonville's hand. If Mr. Dassonville were not rich, how then — unless ——

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I thought — that is, everybody says you are the richest man in these parts."

"As to that, well, perhaps, I have a little more money than my neighbours."

Peter breathed relief. The beautiful Mrs. Dassonville's rings were paid for, then.

"But as to being *rich*, why, when you come to a really rich man all I've got wouldn't be a pinch to him." Mr. Dassonville illustrated with his own thumb and fingers how little that would be. "We don't have really rich men in a place like Harmony," he concluded. "You have to go to the city for that."

"You've got everything you want, haven't you?"

Mr. Dassonville looked over at his wife, and the smile bloomed again; he smiled quietly to himself as he admitted it. "Yes, I've got everything I want."

They were quiet, all of them, for a little while, with Peter turning his hat over in his hands and Mr. Dassonville laying the tips of his fingers together before him, resting his elbows on the arms of the chair.

"I wish," said Peter at last, "you would tell me how you did it."

"How I got more money than my neighbours? Well, I wasn't born with it."

This was distinctly encouraging. Neither was Peter.

"No two men, I suppose, make money in the same way," went on the man who had, "but there are three or four things to be observed by all of them. In the first place one must be very hard-working."

"Yes," said Peter.

"And one must never lose sight of the object worked for. Not" — as if he had followed the boy's inward drop of dismay — "that a man should think of nothing but getting money. On the contrary, I consider it very essential for a man to have some escape from his business, some change of pasture to run his mind in. He comes fresher to his work so. What I mean is that *when* he works he must make every stroke count toward the end he has in view. Do you understand?"

"I think so." The House and the Shining Walls were safe, at any rate.

"And then," Mr. Dassonville checked off the points on his fingers, "he must always save something from his income, no matter how small it is."

"I try to do that," confessed Peter, "but what with Ellen's back being bad, and the interest on the mortgage, it's not so easy."

"Is there a mortgage? I am sorry for that, for the next thing I was going to say is that he must never go into debt, never on any account."

"My father was sick; it was an accident," Peter protested loyally.

"So! I think I remember. Well, it is unfortunate, but where there is a debt the only thing is to reduce it as steadily as possible, and if this mortgage teaches you the trick of saving it may not be such a bad thing for you. But when a man works and saves for a long time without getting any sensible benefit, he sometimes thinks that saving and working are not worth while. You must never make that mistake."

"Oh, no," said Peter. It seemed to him that they were getting on very well indeed.

"There is another thing I should like to say,"

Mr. Dassonville went on, "but I am not sure I can put it plainly. It is that you must not try to be too wise." He smiled a little to Peter's blankness. "I believe in Harmony it is called looking on all sides of a thing, but there is always one side of everything like the moon which is turned from us. You must just start from where you are and keep moving."

"I see," said Peter, looking thoughtfully into the fire, in imitation of Mr. Dassonville. And there being no more advice forthcoming he began to wonder if he ought to sit a while from politeness, as people did in Bloombury, or go at once. Mrs. Dassonville got up and came behind her husband's chair.

"Don't you think you ought to tell him, David, that there are other things worth having besides money; better worth?"

"You, perhaps." Mr. Dassonville took the hand of his wife laid on his shoulder and held it against his cheek; it brought out for Peter suddenly, how many years younger she was, and what he had heard of Mr. Dassonville having married her from among the summer folk who came to Harmony for the pine woods

and the sea air. "Ah, but I'm not sure I'd have you without a great deal of it. It takes money to raise rare plants like you. But I ought to say," still holding his wife's hand to his cheek and watching Peter across it, "that I think it is a very good sign that you are willing to ask. The most of poor men will sit about and rail and envy the rich, but hardly one would think to ask how it is done, or believe if he were told. They've a notion it's all gouging and luck, and you couldn't beat that out of them if you tried. Very few of them understand how simple success is; it isn't easy often, but it is always simple."

Peter supposed that he really ought to go after that, though he did not know how to manage it until Mrs. Dassonville smiled at him over her husband's shoulder and asked him what sort of work he did. "Oh, if you know about gardens," she interrupted him, "you can help a little. There are such a lot of things coming up in mine that I don't know the names of."

It flashed out to Peter long afterward that she had simply provided an easy way for him to get out of the house now that his visit was

terminated. She held the white fold of her shawl over her head with one hand and gathered the trailing skirts with the other. They rustled as she moved like the leaves of the elms at night above the roof, as she led him along the walk where little straight spears of green and blunt flower crowns faintly tinged with colour came up thickly in the borders. So by degrees she got him down past the hyacinth beds and the nodding buds of the daffodils to the gate and on the road again, walking home in the chill early twilight with the pricking of a pleasant excitement in his veins.

It was that, perhaps, and the sense of having got so much more out of it than any account of his visit would justify, that kept Peter from saying much to his mother that night about his talk with the rich man; he asked her instead if she had ever seen Mrs. Dassonville.

"Yes," she assured him. "Mr. Dassonville drove her over to Mrs. Tillinghurst's funeral in October. They had only been married a little while then; she is the second Mrs. Dassonville, you know; the first died years ago. I thought her a very lovely lady."

"A lovely lady," Peter said the phrase under his breath. The sound of it was like the soft drawing of silken skirts.

His mother looked at him across the supper table and was pleased to see the renewal of cheerfulness, and then, motherlike, sighed to think that Peter was getting so old now that if he didn't choose to tell her things she had no right to ask him. "Your walk has done you good," was all she said, and it must have been the case, for that very night as soon as his head had touched the pillow he was off again, as he hadn't been since Ellen fell ill, to the House of the Shining Walls. It rose stately against a blur of leafless woods and crocus-coloured sky. The garden before it was all full of spring bulbs and the scent of daffodils. The Princess came walking in it as before, but she was no Princess now, merely a woman with her dark hair brushed up in a half moon from her brow and her skirts drawing after her with a silken rustle; her face was dim and sweet, with only a faint, a very faint, reminder of Ada, and her name was the Lovely Lady.

PART TWO

IN WHICH PETER BECOMES INVISIBLE ON THE WAY TO GROWING RICH

PART TWO

IN WHICH PETER BECOMES INVISIBLE ON THE WAY TO GROWING RICH

IN THE late summer of that year Peter went up to the city with Mr. Greenslet to lay in his winter stock and remained in canned goods with Siegel Brothers' Household Emporium. That his mother had rented the farming land for cash was the immediate occasion of his setting out, but there were several other reasons and a great many opinions. Mr. Greenslet had a boy of his own coming on for Peter's place; Bet, the mare, had died, and the farm implements wanted renewing; in spite of which Mrs. Weatheral could hardly have made up her mind to spare him except for the opportune appearance of the cash renter. With that and the chickens and the sewing, she and Ellen could take care of themselves and the interest, which would leave all that Peter could make to count against the mortgage.

They put it hopefully to one another so, as they sat about the kitchen stove, all three of them holding hands, on the evening before his departure. But the opinions, which were rather thicker at Bloombury than opportunities, were by no means so confident as Peter could have wished if he had known them. Mr. Greenslet thought it couldn't be much worse than Peter's present situation, and the neighbours were sure it wasn't much better. The minister had a great deal to say of the temptations of a young man in the city, which was afterward invalidated by the city's turning out quite another place than he described it.

It was left for Ellen and Mrs. Jim Harvey to make the happy prognostication. "You can trust Peter," Ada was confident.

"But you got to be mighty cute to get in with those city fellows," her husband warned her, "and Peter's so dashed simple; never sees anything except what's right in front of him. Now a man" — Jim assumed this estate for himself in the right of being three months married — "has got to look on all sides of a thing."

As for Ellen, she hadn't the slightest doubt

that Peter was shortly to become immensely wealthy and she was to go up and keep house for him.

"There'll be gold chairs in the parlour and real Brussels," she anticipated. Peter affected to think it unlikely that she could be spared by the highly mythical person who was to carry her off to keep house for himself. Somehow Peter could never fall into the normal Bloomsbury attitude of thinking that if you had hip disease, your life was bound to be different from everybody's and you might as well say so right out, flat-footed, and be done with it.

With all this, finally he was got off to the city in the wake of Mr. Greenslet, and the first discovery he made there was that outside of Siegel Brothers, and a collarless man with a discouraged moustache who appeared in the hall of his lodging-house when the rent was due, he was practically invisible. As he went up and down the stairs sodden with scrub water which never by any possible chance left them scrubbed, nobody spoke to him. Nobody in the street saw him walking to and fro in his young loneliness. There were men passing there with faces

like Mr. Dassonville's, keen and competent, and lovely ladies in soft becoming wraps and bright winged hats — such hats! Peter would like to have hailed some of these as one immeasurably behind but still in the way, seized of that precious inward quality which manifests itself in competency and brightness. He would have liked to feel them looking on friendlily at his business of becoming rich; but he remained, as far as any word from them was concerned, completely invisible. He came after a while to the conclusion that most of those who went up and down with him were in the same unregarded condition.

The city appeared quite habituated to this state of affairs; hordes of them came and went unconfronted between banked windows of warmth and loveliness, past doors from which light and music overflowed into the dim street in splashes of colour and sound, where people equally under the prohibition lapped them up hungrily like dogs at puddles. Sometimes in the street cars or subways he brushed against fair girls from whom the delicate aroma of personality was like a waft out of that country

of which his preferences and appreciations acknowledged him a native, but no smallest flutter of kinship ever put forth from them to Peter. The place was crammed full of everything that anybody could want and nobody could get at it, at least not Peter, nor anybody he knew at Siegel Brothers. And at the lodging house they seemed never to have heard of the undiminished heaps of splendour that lay piled behind plate glass and polished counters. It was extraordinary, incredible, that he wasn't to have the least of them.

As the winter closed in on him, the restrictions of daily living rose so thick upon him that they began to prevent him from his dreams. He could no longer get through them to the House with the Shining Walls. Often as he lay in his bed trying to believe he was warm enough, he would set off for it down the lanes of blinding city light through which the scream of the trolley pursued him, only to see it glimmer palely on him through impenetrable plate glass, or defended from him by huge trespass signs that appeared to have some relation to the fact that he was not yet so rich as he

expected to be. Times when he would wake out of his sleep, it would be to a strange sense of severances and loss, and though he did not know exactly what ailed him, it was the loss of all his dreams. After a while the whole city seemed to ache with that loss. He would lie in his narrow bed and think that if he did not see his mother and Bloombury again he would probably die of it.

Then along in the beginning of April somebody saw him. It was in the dusk between supper and bed time, walking on the viaduct where he had the park below him. There was a wash of blue still in the sky and a thin blade of a moon tinging it with citron; here and there the light glittered on the trickle of sap on the chafed boughs. It was just here that he met her. She was about his own age, and she was walking oddly, as though unconscious of the city all about her, with short picked steps, and her hat with the tilt to it of a girl who knows herself admired. She had a rose at her breast which she straightened now and then, or smoothed a fold of her dress and hummed as she walked. Her cheeks were bright even in the dusk, and some

strange, quick fear kept pace with her glancing. Peter was walking heavily himself, as the young do when the dreams have gone out of them, and as they passed in the light of the arc that danced delicately to the wandering air, the girl's look skimmed him like a swallow. She must have turned just behind him, for in a moment she drifted past his shoulder.

"Hello!" she said.

"Hello!" said Peter, but, in the moment it had taken to drag that up from under his astonishment, she had passed him; her laugh as she went brushed the tip of his youth like a swallow's wing. It remained with him as a little, far spark; it seemed as if a dream was about to spin itself out from it. He went around that way several times on his evening walks in hopes that he might meet her again.

As though the spark had lightened a little of the blank unrecognition with which the city met him, he was seen that day and in no unfriendly aspect by "our Mr. Croker" of Siegel Brothers. The running gear of a great concern like the Household Emporium pressed, in the days of Peter's apprenticeship, unequally at

times on its employees, and the galled spot of the canned goods department was Blinders the bundle boy. His other name was Horace and he was chiefly remarkable for pimples which he seemed to think interesting, and for a state of active resentment against anybody who gave him anything to do. The world for Horace was a dark jungle full of grouches and pulls and privilege and devious guile.

That the propensity which Peter had developed for inquiring every half hour or so if he hadn't got that done yet, could be nothing else but a cabal directed against Blinders' four dollars and a half a week, he was convinced. In all the time that he could spare from his pimples, Horace rehearsed a martyr's air designed to convey to Mr. Croker that though he would suffer in silence he was none the less suffering. It being precisely Mr. Croker's business to rap out grouches as an expert mechanician taps defective cogs, it happened the day after Peter's meeting with the girl that the worst hopes of Horace were realized.

"Aw, they're always a pickin' on me, Mr. Croker, that's what they are, Mr. Croker,"

Horace defended himself, preparing to snivel if the occasion seemed to demand it, by taking out his gum and sticking it on the inside of his sleeve. "I can't handle 'em no faster, Mr. Croker."

"Not the way you go at it," Peter assured him. Anybody could have told by the way he included Mr. Croker in his cheerfulness that there was something between them. "You turn 'em over too many times and you use too much paper and too much string." Suddenly Peter reddened with embarrassment. "Not that that makes any difference to a big firm like this," he apologized, "but in a small place every little counts." He turned the package deftly and began to illustrate his method. "When you're tying up calico with one hand and taking in eggs and butter with the other and telling three people the price of things at the same time," he explained, "you have to notice things like this."

"I see," said Mr. Croker. "You try it, Blinders."

"Aw, what's the matter with the way I was doin' it?" wailed Horace.

"If you don't feel quite up to it——" Mr. Croker hinted. Horace did, he wrapped with alacrity and Peter showed him how to hold the string.

"You come along with me, Weatheral," Mr. Croker commanded. Horace took his gum out of his cuff and made dark prognostication as to what was probably to be done to Peter.

What Peter thought was that he should probably become very unpopular with his fellow clerks. Croker took him across to dry goods, where girls were tying bundles in little cages over the sales ladies' heads, and had him repeat the method of handling string. Except that he thought he should get to like Mr. Croker, the incident made no particular impression on Peter — so dulled were all his senses for want of dreams, — and passed wholly out of mind.

It was two or three days after that he saw the girl again, nearer the end of the viaduct, where four or five streets poured light and confusion into Venable Square. She was going on ahead, hurrying and pretending not to hurry

to overtake a man to whom she wished to speak. She was quite close to him, she was speaking, and suddenly he gave a little outward jerk with his elbow which caught hers unexpectedly and whirled her back against the parapet. The little purse she was carrying fell from her hand. The man gave a quick laugh over his shoulder and ploughed his way across the street.

"The skunk!" Peter's list of expletives was not extensive. He picked up the flat little purse and handed it back to her. "Shall I go after him? Did you know him?"

The girl was holding on to the parapet with a little choky laugh. "Oh, yes, I know that kind. No, I don't want him!"

"He ought to have a good thrashing," Peter was convinced. The girl looked up at him with a sudden curiosity.

"You're from the country, ain't you? I thought so the other night. I can always tell."

"I guess you're from the country yourself," Peter hazarded. She was prettier even than he had thought. Her glance had left his, however, and was roving up and down the

hurrying crowd as though testing it for some plunge she was about to make.

"If you wanted me to see you home ——" Peter hinted; he did not know quite what was expected of him. She answered with a little sharp noise which ended in a cough.

"I guess you're real kind," she admitted, "but I ain't goin' home just yet. I got a date." She moved off then, and since it was in the direction he was going, there was nothing for Peter to do but move with her, on the other side of the wide pavement. At the turn she drifted back to his side again; it seemed to Peter there was amusement in her tone.

"You got anything to do Saturday about this time?" Peter hadn't. "Well, I'll be here — savvy?" But before he could make her any assurance she laughed again and slipped into the crowd.

Peter knew a great many facts about life. There were human failings even in Bloombury, and what Peter didn't know about the city had been largely made up to him by the choice conversation of J. Wilkinson Cohn, in staples, at the next counter to him. Anybody who

listened long enough to J. Wilkinson's personal reminiscences would have found himself fully instructed for every possible contingency likely to arise between a gentleman of undoubted attractions and the ladies, but there are forces in youth that are stronger than experience. It is a very old, old way of the world for young things to walk abroad in the spring and meet one another.

Peter strolled along the viaduct Saturday and felt his youth beat in him pleasantly when he saw her come. She had on a different hat, and the earlier hour showed him the shining of her eyes above the raddled cheeks.

"We could go down in the park a piece," he suggested as they turned in together along the parapet. There was a delicate damp smell coming up from it on the night, like the Bloomsbury lanes.

"You're regular country, aren't you?" There was an accent of impatience in her tone, "I haven't had my supper yet."

"Well, what do you say to a piece of roast beef and a cup of coffee?" Peter had planned this magnificence as he came along fingering

his pay envelope. He knew just the place, he told her. The feeling of his proper male ascendency as he drew her through the crowd was a tonic to him; the man tossing pancakes in the window where he hesitated looking for the ladies' entrance seemed quite to enjoy doing it, as though he had known all along there was to be company.

"Oh, I don't care for any of these places." Peter felt her pull at his elbow. "I'll show you." They went along then, brushing lightly shoulder to shoulder until they came to one of those revolving doors from which gusts of music issued. There was a girl standing up to sing as they sat down and the whole air of the place was beyond even the retailed splendour of J. Wilkinson. The girl threw back her wraps and began to order freely. Peter, who had a glimpse of the card, stiffened.

"I — I guess I'm not so very hungry," he cautioned. She looked up from the menu sharply and her face softened; she made one or two deft changes in it.

"This is Dutch, you know," she threw out. "Oh, I know you invited me, but you didn't

think I was one of the kind that let a strange gentleman pay for my dinner, did you?" Peter denied it, stricken with embarrassment. She seemed in the light, to take him in more completely.

"Say, would you have licked that fellow the other night, honest?"

"Well, if he was disrespectful to a lady——" Peter began.

"Oh, *excuse* me!" She turned her head aside for a moment in her long gloves. "You *are* country!" she said again, but it seemed not to displease her. "I don't care so much for her voice, do you?" She turned on the singer. They discussed the entertainment and the dinner. They were a long time about it. The orchestra played a waltz at last, and Ethel—she had told him to call her that — put her arms on the table and leaned across to him, and though Peter knew by this time that her cheeks were painted, he didn't somehow mind it.

"What's it like up in the country where you lived?" she wished to know.

"Hills mostly, little wooded ones, and high

pastures, and the apple orchards going right up over them. . . ."

"I know," she nodded. "I guess it's them I been smelling . . . or laylocks."

"Things coming up in the garden," Peter contributed: "peonies, and long rows of daffodils. . . ." He did not realize it, but he had described to her no place that he had known but the way to the House. The girl cut him off.

"Don't!" she said sharply. "You know," she half apologized, "you kind of remind me of somebody . . . a boy I knew up country. It was him that got me here ——" She made her little admission quietly, the horror of it long worn down to daily habit. "That first time I saw you, it seemed almost as if it was him . . . I ain't never blamed him — much. He didn't mean to be bad, but when the trouble came he couldn't help none. . . . I guess real help is about the hardest thing to find there is."

"I guess it is."

"Oh, well, we gotta make the best of it." She glanced at Peter with her head on one side

as she twiddled her fingers across the cloth to the tune of the orchestra.

They went out at last and walked in the least frequented streets, and Peter held her hand; the warmth of it ran with a pleasant tingling in his veins. He seemed to have touched in her palm the point at which the city came alive to him. They walked and walked and yet it seemed that something lacked to bring the evening to a finish; it was incredible to Peter that after all his loneliness he should have to let her go.

"We could go up to my place," Ethel suggested. "It's up here." He hadn't suspected that she had been guiding him.

"I guess not to-night." Peter's blood was singing in his ears. In the dark of the unfrequented street he could feel her young body leaning toward his.

"Say, you know I ain't after the money the way some girls are; I like you . . . honest ——"

"I guess I'd better go home." But they went on up the side street a little farther. "Good-bye," he said, but he did not let her go.

She shook her hand free at last.

"Oh, well, of course, if you don't want to. . . ." He felt her soft hands fumbling at his face; she drew him down to a kiss. Suddenly she sprang away, laughing. "Go, you silly!"

"Ethel!" he cried, but he lost her in the dark. He should have let her go at that; he knew he should. In spite of her paying half, his dinner had cost him more than two ordinary dinners . . . and besides. . . . He couldn't help, however, walking around by the viaduct for several evenings the next week, and at last he saw her. She was going by without speaking, but he got squarely in front of her.

"Ethel!"

She pretended just to have recognized him.

"Oh, you here? I thought you'd gone back to the country!"

"You aren't mad with me about . . . the other night?" He did not quite know how to express the quality of his desertion.

"Who? Me?" airily. "Oh, I guess there's just as good fish in the sea ——" She changed all at once under his young hunger for com-

panionship. "You're good," she said; "you're the real thing."

"You're good, too," he was certain, "when you're with me."

"Oh, it rubs off. Say, kid, I guess you got folks at home you're sending money to and all that, and you got to get ahead in the world. Well, you don't want to have nothing to do with my kind, and that's straight." The deviltry she put on toward him failed pitifully. "Chase yourself, kid; I just ain't good for you any more." Nevertheless they moved along the parapet to the dark interval between the lights and there they kissed again, this time with no undercurrent.

"Good-bye, Ethel."

"Good-bye, boy." The little spark was out.

PART THREE

IN WHICH PETER BECOMES A BACHELOR

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I

THE day before leaving for his summer vacation Peter was notified that he was wanted in his private office by the younger Siegel Brother. Though he couldn't quite fall in with the dark prognostications of Blinders that he was about to be mulcted of his salary by a plot which had been plainly indicated by the marked partiality of our Mr. Croker, the incident gave him some uneasiness. The young Siegel Brother must have been younger than somebody of course, though it couldn't have been by more than a scratch, and he might have been any age without betraying it, so deeply was he sunk in the evidence of the surpassing quality of the grocery department. However, there was something surprisingly young looking out at Peter

from the junior brother's red and white rotundity, at which he took heart immensely.

"Weatheral, Peter, canned goods, recommended by Mr. Greenslet," Siegel Brother ticked him off from a manilla envelope. "Just a little honorarium, Mr. Weatheral, we are in the habit of distributing to such of our employees as make practical suggestions to the advantage of the business." Contriving to make his hands meet in front of him by clasping them very high up on his chest, Siegel Brother assumed that he had folded his arms, and waited to see what Peter would do about it.

"We have also a little savings bank for the benefit of our employees which pays 3 per cent., yet I believe we have you not among our depositors." There was the slightest possible burr to his speech as though it were blunted by so much fatness.

"Well, you see, sir — there's a mortgage." Peter was afraid he should damage himself by the admission, but the firm heard him out.

"How much?"

"It was a thousand, but we've got it down to seven hundred — six hundred and sixty,"

Peter corrected himself with a glance at his honorarium.

"And the farm, it is worth ——" Siegel Brother parted his hands slightly to admit of any valuation.

"Two thousand."

"So! Well, Mr. Weatheral, that is not so bad, and if I were you, when I had occasion to speak of it I would say, not 'I am paying a mortgage,' that is dead work, Mr. Weatheral, but 'I am buying a farm.' It goes easier so."

"Thank you, sir, I'll remember." He supposed his employer was done with him, but as he turned to go he heard his name again.

"You will report to our Mr. Croker when you return, Mr. Weatheral; he thinks he can use you."

Two weeks later when he came back rested from Bloombury, Peter found himself visible to at least ten persons, all of whom pertained to the boarding-house of the exclusive Mrs. Blodgett, where, by the advice of J. Wilkinson Cohn, he engaged a small room on the third floor with a window opening some six feet from the rear wall of a wholesale stationery, and one

electric light discreetly placed to discourage the habit of reading in bed.

From this time on he was visible to Mrs. Blodgett and Aggie and Miss Thatcher, whom he already knew as the pure food demonstrator in dairy products, to two inconsiderable young women from the wholesale stationer's, and a gentleman from a shoe store, the whole of whose physiognomy appeared to be occupied with the effort to express an engaging youthfulness which the crown of his head explicitly denied. He was occasionally visible to the representative of gentlemen's outfitters who was engaged to Aggie and took Sunday dinners with them, and he was particularly and pleasingly visible to J. Wilkinson Cohn and Miss Minnie Havens. The rest of his fellow boarders were so much of a likeness, a kind of family likeness that spread all over Siegel Brothers and such parts of the city as Peter had been admitted to, that it was a relief to Peter to realize from his profile that J. Wilkinson's last name probably ought to have been spelled Cohen. The determinedly young gentleman explained to him that J. Wilkinson's intrusion into the exclusiveness of Blod-

gett's was largely a concession to Aggie's being as good as married and not liable to social contamination, and to the fact that the little Jew was amusing and pretty near white, anyway.

Miss Minnie Havens did typewriting and stenography in a downtown office and was understood to be in search of economic independence, rather than under the necessity of making a living. She had a high fluffy pompadour and a half discoverable smile which could be brought to a very agreeable laugh if one spent a little pains at it. J. Wilkinson Cohn appeared to find it worth the pains.

The particular advantage of Blodgett's, besides the fact that you could have two helps of everything without paying extra for it, was that it was exclusive and social. Mrs. Blodgett had collected her family of boarders on the principle of not having anybody who wasn't a suitable companion for Aggie. There was also a pianola which gave the place a tone.

There was fire and light in the dining-room at Blodgett's from seven to nine always, and in the parlour with the pianola on Saturday even-

ing and all day Sunday. Sometimes, even on week days after supper, J. Wilkinson would open the door into the darkened room, push away the pianola and sing topical songs to his own accompaniment until his stiffened fingers clattered on the keys. Other times he would give imitations of popular stage celebrities until Blodgett's shouted with laughter. At all times they appeared to have a great many engagements. Peter was advised to join this or that organization, and to enter upon social occasions that unfortunately presented themselves in the light of occasions to spend money. Apparently there were no dragons tracking the path of Blodgett's boarders. Miss Havens did better than any of them for him. She explained to him how to get books from the circulating library, and let him read hers until he could arrange for a card. She said it was a pleasure to think there was going to be somebody in the house who was congenial. It wasn't that she had anything against Miss Thatcher and the rest of them — they just didn't have the same tastes. She thought a person ought to spend some of the time improving their minds.

Although the expression was ambiguous, it served as a sort of sedative to the aching vacuity of the hours which Peter spent away from Siegel Brothers. He found himself spending as many as possible of them with Miss Havens. She had a way of making the frivolling talk of the supper table appear a warrantable substitute for the things that Peter knew, even while he echoed her phrases, that he wasn't getting. He found himself skidding on the paths of self-improvement and the obligations of seeing life, along the edges of desolation. He immersed himself as far as possible in the atmosphere of Blodgett's in order that he needn't have any time left in which to consider how far it fell short of what he had come to find. For this reason he was usually the last at the supper table, but there were occasions when he found it discreet to slip away as early and quietly as possible.

It was one evening about two months after his instalment at Blodgett's. Peter was sitting in his room when he heard them yammering at his door with so much hilarious insistence that he found himself getting up to

open it, without giving himself time to put down the book he was reading or to take off the overcoat he had put on for want of a fire, and finding himself in some embarrassment because of the misapprehension which this fact involved.

"Ready, Peter?"

"Come along, Peter!"

"I . . . I'm not going," said Peter.

"What? Not going to the rink with us tonight? Why, you said——" The bright group of his fellow boarders hung upon the narrow landing like bees at the threshold of a hive.

"I said I'd go if I could—" protested Peter, "and I can't."

"Gee! What's the matter with you?"

"Don't be a beastly stiff!"

"Come on, fellows, we'll miss the car. Let him be a stiff if he wants to."

Peter heard their feet retreating on the stairs, and then he saw that Minnie Havens still hesitated at the landing. She had on her best silk waist and her blond pompadour was brushed higher than ever. Her eyes, which were blue, were fixed directly on him with something in

the meeting that gave him the impression, gaspingly, of being about to step off into space. He seemed suddenly to see a path opening directly through the skating rink and the Saturday Social Club to the House of the Shining Walls, and Minnie Havens walking in it beside him. He wrenched his mind away forcibly from that and fixed it on the figure of his weekly salary.

"Couldn't you?" she persuaded.

"No," said Peter. "I'm much obliged to you, but I really couldn't."

But before he had time to take up his reading, which somehow he was not able to do immediately, he heard Mrs. Blodgett, who made a point of being as kind to her boarders as she could afford to be, tapping at his door.

"I thought you'd be going to the rink tonight."

"No," said Peter.

"You don't think it's wrong, or anything?"

"Oh, no, not in the least."

"Well, Mr. Weatheral, I've seen a power of young folks, comin' and goin', in my business and it don't pay for 'em to get too stodgy like.

They need livenin' up." She hung upon the door as Peter waited for her to go. "Miss Havens is a nice girl," she ventured.

Peter admitted it. "I've my mother and sister to think of," he told her, and presently he found he had told her a great deal more.

"Well," commented Mrs. Blodgett, "you do have a lot to carry. . . . Was you readin' now, Mr. Weatheral? . . . because it's warmer down in my sittin' room, and there's only Aggie and me sewin'. . . . Besides," she argued triumphantly, "it's savin' light."

First and last he heard a great deal about saving at Blodgett's. Aggie, who was making up her white things, had something to tell every evening almost, about the price of insertion. But it was saving for a purpose; they were in the way, most of them, of being investors. J. Wilkinson had sixty dollars in his brother's cigar stand on Fifty-fourth street. He used to let his brother off for Sunday afternoons with quite a proprietary air. The shoe gentleman, whose very juvenile name was Wally Whitaker, didn't believe in such a mincing at

prosperity. He talked freely about tips and corners and margins and had been known to make twenty-seven dollars in copper once. He offered Peter some exclusive inside information in B and C's before he had been in the house a month.

"Well, you see," Peter explained himself, "I'm buying a farm up our way!" His fellow boarders laid down their forks to look at him; he could see reflected from their several angles how he had placed himself by the mere statement of his situation. He felt at once the resistance it gave him, the sense of something to pull against, of having got his feet under him. It was the point at which the conquest of the mortgage dragon began to present itself to him as a thing accomplished rather than a thing escaped.

It must have been this feeling of release which opened up for him, from pictures that he saw occasionally with Miss Havens on Sundays, from books he read and discussed with her, avenues that appeared to lead more or less directly to the House. There were times when he found himself walking in them with Miss

Minnie Havens, and yet always curiously expecting the Lovely Lady when they found her there, to be quite another person. He came within an inch of telling her about it on the occasion on which she presented him with an embroidered hat marker for Christmas, and when he took her to the theatre with tickets the floor walker had presented to him on account of Mrs. Floor Walker not feeling up to it. It appeared, further, that Miss Havens had a way of falling into profound psychological difficulties which required a vast amount of talking over, and a great many appeals to Peter's disinterested judgment to extract her, not without some subtle intimations of dizzying escapes for himself. Peter supposed that was always the way with girls. It came to a crisis later where Miss Havens' whole destiny hung upon the point as to whether she could accept a situation offered her in her own town, or should stay on in the city and see what came of it.

"You'd get more salary there, and be able to live cheaper?" Peter wished to know.

"Oh, yes." The implication of her tone was

that she didn't see what that had to do with it. It was toward the end of June, and she was looking very pretty in a white dress and a hat that set off her pompadour to advantage, and there was no special reason, as they had the afternoon before them, why they should not have taken some of the by-paths that the girl perceived to lead out from the subject into breathless wonder. She had ways, which were maidenly and good, of opening up to Peter comfortable little garden plots of existence which, though they lay far this side of the House and the Lovely Lady, had in the monotony of the long climb up the scale of Siegel Brothers, moments of importunate invitation.

"And you came up to the city," Peter went on in the gravelled walk of fact, "just to improve yourself in shorthand so you could get such a situation? I don't see why you hesitate."

Miss Havens could hardly say why herself.

"There were so many ways of bettering one's self in the city. I've a great many friends here," she hinted.

"Not so many," Peter reminded her, "as you'd have where you were brought up."

"You are staying in the city?" Miss Havens suggested.

"That's different. I have to." He had already told her about Ellen and also about his mother.

"And are you always going to stay on here like this, working and working and never taking any time for yourself? Aren't you ever going to . . . marry?"

"I know too much what poverty is like to ask any woman to share it," Peter protested.

"Suppose she should ask you?"

"They don't do that; the right sort."

"I don't see why . . . if some girl . . . cared . . . and if she saw . . . anybody struggling along under burdens she would be glad to share, and she knew because of that he didn't mean to ask her . . . You think she ought not to let him know?"

"I think it wouldn't be best," said Peter.

"You think the man would despise her?"

"Not that; but if he liked her a little . . . he might consent to it . . . just because he liked her and was tired maybe . . . and that wouldn't be good for either of them."

"Well, anyway, it doesn't concern either of us," said Miss Havens.

The next evening as Peter was letting himself in at his own door — he had moved to the second floor front by this time —Mrs. Blodgett stopped him.

"Miss Havens left her regards for you," she explained. "She went to-day."

"Oh," said Peter, "wasn't it sudden?"

"Sort of. She'd been considerin' of it for some time, and last night she made up her mind. But I did think," said Mrs. Blodgett, "that she'd have said good-bye to *you*." And not eliciting anything by way of a reply, she added: "Miss Havens is a nice girl. I hate to think of her slavin' her life out in an office. She'd ought to get married."

"A girl has ever so many more chances in her home town," Peter offered hopefully.

"Yes, I suppose so." Mrs. Blodgett sighed. "Is there anything I can do for you, Mr. Weatheral?"

"Nothing, thank you." He was lingering still on the landing on Mrs. Blodgett's account, but he found his finger slipping between the

leaves of the volume he had brought from the library.

"Ah," she warned him, "readin' is an improvin' occupation, but there's a book we hadn't any of us ought to miss, and that's the Book of Life, Mr. Weatheral." And somehow with that ringing in his ears, Peter spent several minutes walking up and down in his room before he could settle to his book again.

II

It was a week or ten days after Miss Havens left, before Peter went down to Bloombury for his midsummer vacation, a week in which he had the greatest difficulty in getting back to the House of the Shining Walls. He set out for it almost immediately with a feeling akin to the release with which one returns to daily habit after the departure of an unexpected guest. But his thought would no sooner strike into the accustomed paths than Miss Minnie Havens would meet him there unaccountably, to begin again those long intimate conversations which led toward and about the

House, but never quite to it. Peter found himself looking out for those meetings with some notion of dodging them, and yet once they were fairly off, he owned them a great relief from Blodgett's. Now that it was withdrawn, he realized in the girl's bright companionship the effect of the rose-red glow of the shade that Aggie drew down over the front parlour lamp on the evenings when the Gentlemen's Outfitter called. It had prevented his seeing until now, that the chief difference between himself and his fellow boarders, was that for most of them, this was a place where they had come to stay. Having let Miss Havens go on alone to the place she was bound for, he had moments of dreadful sinking, as it occurred to him to wonder if he hadn't made a mistake in the nature of his own destination. Suppose, after all, he should find himself castaway in some oasis of determined sprightliness with Wally Whitaker in whose pocket pretenses of tips and margins he began to discern a poorer sort of substitute for the House. He was as much bored by the permanently young shoe-salesman after this dis-

covery as before it, but obliged to set a watch on himself lest in a moment of finding himself too much in the same case, he should make the mistake of inviting Wally to Bloombury for his vacation.

He was relieved, when at last he had got away without it, to be saved from such a misadventure, for he found his mother not standing the heat well, and Ellen anxious. He had never definitely shaped to himself the idea that there could anything happen to his mother; she was as much a part of his life as the aging apple trees and the hills that climbed, with low, gnarled pines to the sky's edge beyond the marshes, a point from which to take distance and direction. He began to note now the graying hair, the shrunken breast and the worn hands, so blue veined for all their brownness, and he could not sleep of nights because of the sweat that was on his soul, for fear of what might come to her. He would lie in the little room under the roof and hear the elms moving like the riffle of silence into sound, thinking of his mother until at last he would be obliged to rise and move softly

about the place, as if by the mere assertion of himself he could make her safer in it. He wished nothing so much as not to disturb her, but she must have been lying awake often herself, for the second or third time this happened, she called to him. He came, half dressed as he was and drew the covers up close about her shoulders, and was exceedingly gay and tender with her.

"There's nothing troubling you, son?"

"Nothing — except to be sure there's nothing troubling *you*."

She gave a little, low laugh like a girl.

"That's so like your father. I remember he would get up in the night when you were little, and go prowling about . . . he used to say he was afraid the roof tree would fall in and kill you. And yet here you are . . . " She reached out to give him a little pat, as if somehow to reassure him. The low dropping moon made a square block of light on the uncarpeted floor; outside, the orchard waited for the dawn, and the fields brimmed life up to their very doors.

"You're like him in other ways," she went

on. "Somehow it's brought him back wonderfully the last two or three days, and especially at night when I'd hear you creaking down the stair. There's a board there which always does creak, and I'd hear you trying to remember which it was, the same as *he* used to ——"

"I haven't meant to keep you awake, mother."

"I've been awake. When you're getting along like, you don't sleep much, Peter. Sleep is for dreaming, some of it, and the old don't dream."

"You're not to go calling yourself old, mother!"

"And me with a son going twenty-three! We weren't so young either when we were married, your father and I . . . but I want you should sleep, Peter, and dream when you can. You have pleasant dreams, son?"

"Any amount of them." He was going off into one of those bright fantasies of what he should do when he was rich as he meant to be, with which he had so often beguiled Ellen's pain, but she kissed him and sent him to bed again lest Ellen should hear them.

It was not more than a day or two after that the minister's wife caught young Mr. Weatheral walking with his mother in the back pasture with his arm about her, and was slightly shocked by it, for though it was thought highly commendable in him to have paid off the mortgage and managed a silk dress for her and Ellen besides, Bloombury was not habituated to a lively expression of family affection. Peter had consented to gather the huckleberries which Ellen insisted were of a superior flavour in the back pasture, on the sole condition that his mother should come with him, and the minister's wife had just stepped aside on her way to the Tillinghurst's to gather the southerwood which grew there, for the minister's winter cough, when she caught sight of them.

"She couldn't have stared more if she'd caught me with a girl." Peter protested.

"It's only that she'd have thought it more likely," his mother extenuated. "I hope you aren't going to be a girl-hater, Peter. I want you should marry some time, and if I haven't seemed anxious about it before now, you

mustn't think it's because I want to keep you for Ellen and me. What I don't want is that you should take to it just *because* there's a girl. Not but what that's natural, but there's more to it than that, Peter. For you, " she supplemented. She sat down on a gray, round stone while Peter stripped the bushes at her feet, and watched to see if his colour rose while she talked, or his gaze failed to meet hers at any point.

"I'd have liked to have Ellen marry," said Ellen's mother, "she's that kind. Having a man of her own, most any kind of a man so as he would be good to her, would mean such a lot. If Ellen can have a little of what everybody's having, she's satisfied. But there are some who can get a great deal more out of it than that . . . and if they don't the rest of it is a drag and a weariness." He left off stripping the bushes and turned contentedly against her knees.

"You're my home, Mumsey."

"And not even," she gently insisted, "when I'm not here to make it for you. There's a kind of life goes with loving; it's like — like

the lovely inside colour of a shell, and somehow, this winter I've wondered if you'd got to the place where you knew what that would be like if you should find it." She turned his face up to her with a tender anxiety and yet with a little timidity; they did not talk much of such things in Bloombury.

"I know, mother."

"Yes . . . " after a long look, "you would; you're so like your father. But if you know, you mustn't ever be led by dullness or loneliness into anything less, Peter. Not that I'm afraid you'll be led into anything wrong . . . but there are things that are almost more wrong than downright wickedness. . . .

"I've been thinking a great deal lately about when I was your age, and there didn't seem anything for me but to marry one of the neighbour's boys that I'd known always, or a long plain piece of school teaching. It wasn't easy with everybody egging me on — but I stuck it out, and at the last along came your father . . . I'd like you to have something like that, Peter, — and your son com-

ing to you the way you came to me, like it was through a cloud of glory . . . " He looked up presently on her silence, silver tipped now with the hope of renewal, and he saw her as a man sometimes when he is young and clean, sees his mother, the Sacred Door . . . and he did not observe at all that her hands were berry stained and the nails broken, nor that her cheek had fallen in and her hair gray and wispy. But being a young man and never good at talking, it made no difference with him except that as they walked home across the pastures he was more than ever careful of her and teased her more whimsically.

He forgot, after he had settled in his room again at Blodgett's, that Miss Minnie Havens had ever walked with him in the purlieus of the House, for he was quite taken up with a new set of rooms he had thrown out from it for his mother. She was always there with him now until the day of her death and long after, made a part of all his dreaming by the touch with which she had limned in herself for him, the feature of all Lovely Ladies.

He would write her long letters into which crept much that had been uttered only in the House, which that winter became an estate in Florida, moved there because of Mrs. Weatheral's need of mild climate. They went abroad after the Christmas Holidays in which she had coughed more than usual and consented to have her breakfast brought up to bed, setting out every evening from Peter's reading-lamp and arriving very shortly at Italian Cathedrals and old Roman seaport towns that smelled of history.

Dreaming of lovely ladies who have no face or form other than they borrow from the passing incident is a very pleasant way of passing the time, and does not necessarily lead to anything; but when a man goes about afraid lest his mother should die for lack of something he might have got for her, he dreams closer at home. More than ever since the revelation of his mother's frailness, Peter dreamed of being rich, and since there was nothing nearer to him than the way Siegel Brothers had managed it, he devoted so much time to the scrutiny of their methods that he passed in a very

short time from being head of the delivery department to the right hand of Mr. Croker. Even Blinders could not recall, in the three years he had been bundle boy, so marked an example of favouritism.

"They don't make partners any more out of underlings," Croker let him know confidentially. "What do you think you're headed for?" Peter explained himself.

"I wanted to find out how they did it."

"And when you find out," Croker wagged at him, "you won't be able to do anything with it. You have to have capital. Look at the time I've been with them!"

"How long is that?" Peter was interested.

"Twenty years." Croker told him.

"In twenty years," Peter was confident, "a man ought to be able to find some capital." After that he began to observe Mr. Croker.

It is probable at this time that if he had not been concerned for his mother's health, he might have grown as dry and uninteresting as at Blodgett's they began to think him.

He was a thin young man with hair of no

particular colour, and eyes that were good and rather shy about women. He went out very little and had not, Miss Thatcher who sat opposite him was sure, a mind above his business. Aggie had married her Outfitter, and J. Wilkinson Cohn, who had become a full partner in his brother's cigar stand, had moved out to Fifty-fourth Street, so that there was nobody who could have contradicted her. But lying awake planning how he might piece out life for his mother with comforts, and hearing in every knock the precursor of what might have happened to her, his heart was exercised as it is good for the heart to be even with pain and anxiety. And beyond the heart stretching there was always the House. He could seldom get away to it in his waking hours, but he knew it was there for him, and visiting it in dreams he kept in spite of the anxiety and Mr. Croker, his young resiliency. Along in December, about two weeks before his midwinter holiday, Ellen sent for him.

"It's not as if there hadn't been time for everything. You must think of that, Peter. And your being able to come down every

Saturday since the first stroke. There's plenty that are hurried away without a good-bye or anything."

"I know, Ellen."

"And it isn't as if there hadn't been plenty to say, either. Six weeks would have been too long for anybody less loving than mother. They wouldn't have known how to go through your life and say just the things you'll be glad to remember when the time comes for them. You've got to keep your mind on those things, Peter."

"Yes, Ellen."

The front room had been well rid up after the funeral and everybody at Ellen's earnest entreaty had left them quite alone. Although there was fire in the base burner, they were sitting together by the kitchen stove, the front of which was thrown open for the sake of the warm glow of the coals. By and by the kettle began to sing and the bare tips of the lilac scratched on the pane like a live thing waiting to be let in. The little familiar sounds refilled for them the empty room.

Outside it was every way such a day as a

well-spent life might slip away in; the tracks in the deep-rutted February snow might have been worn there by the habit of sixty years. There was no hint of the spring yet, but here and there in the bare patches on the hills and the frayed icy edges of the drifts, the sign that the weight of the winter was behind them. There would be a little quiet time yet and then the resurrection. The brother and sister had taken it all very quietly. Nobody had ever taken anything in any other way in the presence of Mrs. Weatheral, and that she was there still for them, that she would always be present in their lives, a warm determining influence, was witnessed by that absence of violence which empties too soon the cup of grief. The loss of their mother had at least brought them no sense of leaving her behind. They were going on with their life so soon because she was going with them.

"That was why I wanted them all to go away," Ellen took up the thought again. "I've been thinking all day about mother being with father and how glad he'll be to see her, and yet it seems as if I can feel her here. I

thought if we kept still a while she'd make us understand what she wanted us to do."

"About what, Ellen?"

"About my going up to the city with you to board — it seemes such a wasteful way to live somehow, just sitting around!"

"It isn't as expensive as keeping house," Peter told her, "and I want you to sit around, Ellen; women in Bloombury don't get enough of that I'm afraid."

"They don't. Did you see Ada Harvey to-day? Four children and two teeth out, and her not thirty. I guess you'd take better care of me than that, Peter,—only ——"

"You think *she* wouldn't like it for you?"

"She thought such a lot of keeping up a home, Peter. It was like — like those Catholics burning candles. It seemed as if she thought you'd get something out of it if it was just going on, even if you didn't visit it more than two or three times a year. Lots of women feel that way, Peter, and I guess there must be something in it."

"There *is* something in it," Peter assured her.

"And if I go and board with you we'd have

to break up everything ——" She looked about on all the familiar mould of daily habit that was her world, and tears started afresh. "And we've got all this furniture." She moved her head toward the door of the front room and the parlour set that had been Peter's Christmas gift to them two years ago. "For all it was such a comfort to her to have it, it's as good as new. It seemed as if she thought you were the only one good enough to sit in it."

"Don't, Ellen."

"I know, Peter." They were silent a while until the deep wells of grief had stilled in the sense of that sustaining presence. "I only wanted to be sure I wouldn't be going against her, breaking up the home. It seems like anything she set such store by oughtn't to stop just because she isn't here to take care of it." They had to come back to that the next day and the next.

"I only want to do what is best for you, Ellen."

"I'd be best off if I was making you happy, Peter — and I'd feel such a burden somehow, just boarding."

"The rents *are* cheaper in the suburbs," Peter went so far as to admit. It was all so inarticulate in him; how could he explain to Ellen the feeling that he had, that settling down to a home with her would somehow put an end to any dreams he had had of a home of his own, persistent but unshaped visions that vanished before the sudden brightening of Ellen's face at his least concession.

"We could have somebody in to clean," she reminded him, "and I hardly ever have to be in bed now."

The fact was that Peter had the very place in mind; he had often walked out there on Sundays from Blodgett's; he thought the neighbourhood had a clean and healthy look. He went up on Tuesday to see what could be done about it.

Lessing, who rented him the apartment, made the natural mistake about it that Peter's age and his inexperience as a householder invited. He said the neighbours were all a most desirable class of people, and Peter could see for himself that the city was bound to build out that way in a few years. As for what Pleasanton could do in the way of climate, well, Lessing told him,

with the air of being only a little less interested than he credited Peter with being, look at the perambulators.

They were as fine a lot of wellfilled vehicles as could be produced by any suburb anywhere, and Ellen for one was never tired of looking at them. But Peter couldn't understand why Ellen insisted on walking home from church Sunday morning the wrong way of the pavement.

"I suppose we do get in the way," she admitted after he had explained to her that they wouldn't be crowded off so frequently if they moved with the nurse-maid's parade and not against it, "but if we go this way we can see all the little faces."

"I didn't know you cared so much for babies."

"Well, you see it isn't as if I was to have any of my own ——" Something in the tone with which she admitted the restraining fact of her affliction brought out for Peter how she had fitted her life to it, like a plant growing hardily out of a rock, climbing over and around it without rancour or rebellion. As he turned now to look at her long, plain face in the light of what had been going on in himself lately, he recalled

that the determining influence which had drawn her thick hair into that unbecoming knot at the back of her neck had been the pain it had given her when she first began to put up her hair, to do it higher.

She was watching the bright little bonneted heads go by with the same detachment that he had learned to look at the shop windows, without thinking of appropriating any of their splendour for himself, and when she spoke again it was without any sensible connection with the present occasion.

"Peter, do you remember Willy Shakeley?"

"Shakey Willy, we used to call him. I remember his freckles; they were the biggest thing about him." He waited for the communicating thread, but nothing came except what presently reached him out of his own young recollections. "He wasn't good enough for you, Ellen," he said at last for all comment.

"He was kind, and he wouldn't have minded about my being lame, but a man has to have a healthy wife if he's a farmer." How completely she had accepted the deprivation for herself, he saw by her not wasting a sigh over

it; she had schooled herself so long to go no further in her thought than she went on the crutch which tapped now on the pavement beside him. As if to stop his going any further on her account she smiled up at him. "Peter, if you were to meet any of the things you thought you'd grow up to be, do you suppose you'd know them?"

At least he could have told her that he didn't meet any of them on his way between Siegel Brothers and the flat in Pleasanton.

There are many things which if a young man goes without until he is twenty-five he can very well do without, but the one thing he cannot leave off without hurting him is the expectation of some time doing them. The obligation of the mortgage and Ellen's lameness had been a sort of bridge for Peter, a high airy structure which engaged the best of him and so carried him safely over Blodgett's without once letting him fall into the unlovely vein of life there, its narrowness, its commonness. He had known, even when he had known it most inaccessible, that there was another life which answered to every instinct of his for beauty and fitness.

He waited only for the release from strain for his entry with it. Now by the shock of his mother's death he found himself precipitated in a frame of living where a parlour set out of Siegel Brothers' Household Emporium was the limit of taste and understanding. The worst thing about Siegel Brothers' parlour sets was that he sold them. He knew it was his particular value to Siegel Brothers that he had always known what sort of things were acceptable to the out-of-town trade. He had selected this one distinctly with an eye to the pleasure his mother and Ellen would get out of what Bloombury would think of it. He hadn't expected it would turn and rend him. That it was distinctly better than anything he had had at Blodgett's was inconsiderable beside the fact that Blodgett's hadn't owned him. That he was owned now by his sister and the furniture, was plain to him the first time he sat down to figure out the difference between his salary and what it would cost him to let Ellen be a burden to him in the way that made her happiest. Not that he thought of Ellen in that way; he was glad when he thought of it at all

articulately, to be able to make life so little of a burden to her. But though he saw quite clearly how, without some fortunate accident, the rest of his life would be taken up with making a home for Ellen and making it secure for her in case anything happened to him, he saw too, that there was no room in it for the Lovely Lady. The worst of all this was that he did not see how he was to go on without her.

He had fled to her from the inadequacy of all substitutes for her that his life afforded, and she had ended by making him over into the sort of man who could never be satisfied with anything less. Something he owed, no doubt, to that trait of his father's which made his memories of Italy more to him than his inheritance, but there it was, a world Peter had built up out of books and pictures and music, more real and habitable than that in which he went about in a gray business suit and a pleasant ready manner; a world from which, every time he fitted his key in the latch of the little flat in Pleasanton, he felt himself suddenly dispossessed.

It was not that he failed to get a proper pleasure out of being a householder, in being able to take a certain tone with the butcher and discuss water rates and rents with other householders going to and fro on his train. Ellen's cooking tasted good to him and it was very pleasant to see the pleasure it gave her to have Burnell of the hardware, out to supper occasionally. He made friends with Lessing, whose natty and determinedly architectural office with its air of being somehow akin to Wally Whitaker, occupied the corner where Peter waited every morning for his car. Lessing began it by coming out on the very first occasion to ask him how his sister did, in an effort to correct any impression of a want of perspicuity in his first estimate of Peter's situation. He kept it up for the reason perhaps that men friends are meant for each other from the beginning of time quite as much as we are accustomed to thinking of them as being meant for the lovely ladies whom they so frequently miss. Lessing was about Peter's own age and had large and cheerful notions of the probable increase of real-estate values in Pleasanton, combined with a just appreciation

of the simple shrewdness which had so recommended Peter to his employers.

"You'd be a crackerjack to talk to the old ladies," Lessing generously praised him. "I scare 'em; they think I'm too hopeful." That he didn't, however, have the same effect on young ladies was apparent from the very pretty one whom Peter used to see about, especially on early closing Saturday afternoons, helping him to shut up the office and get off to the ball game. He couldn't have told why, but those were the days when Peter allowed the car to carry him on to the next block, before alighting, after which he would make a point of being particularly kind to Ellen. It would never do for her to get a notion that the tapping of her crutch beside him had scared anything out of Peter's life which he might think worth having in it.

Along toward Thanksgiving time, on an occasion when Peter had just missed his car and had to wait for another one, Lessing — J. B. on the door sign, though he was the sort that everybody who knew him called Julian — came quite out to the pavement and

stood there with his hands in his pockets and his hair beginning to curl boyishly in the dampness, quite brimming over with good fortune. Singularly he didn't mention it at once, but began to complain about the low state of the market in real estate.

"Not but that the values are all right," he was careful to explain; "it's just that they *are* all right makes it so trying. If a fellow had a little capital now, he could do wonders. The deuce of a chap like me is that he hasn't any capital unless there's some buying."

"You think it's a good time then to lay out a little money?"

"Good! *Good!* Oh, Lord, it's so good that if a fellow had a few thousands just put around judiciously, he wouldn't be able to sleep nights for hearing it turn over." He kicked the gravel in sheer impatience. "How's your sister?"

It was a formula that he had kept on with because to have dropped it immediately might have betrayed the extenuating nature of its inception, and besides there were so many directions in which one might start conversationally off from it. He made use of it now without

waiting for Peter's habitual "Very well, thank you," by a burst into confidence.

"You see I'm engaged to be married — yes, I guess you've seen me with her. Fact is, I haven't cared how much people have seen so long as she's seen it, too; and now we've got it all fixed up, naturally I'm on the make. I'm dashed if I don't think I'll have to take a partner."

"I've been wanting to speak to you about some property of mine," Peter ventured. "It's a farm up country."

"What's it worth?"

"Well, I've added to it some the last ten years and made considerable improvement. I ought to get three thousand."

"That's for farming? For summer residence it ought to bring more than that. Any scenery?"

"Plenty," Peter satisfied him on that score. "I've been thinking," he let out shyly, "that if I could put the price of it in some place where I could watch it, the money would do me more good. . . ."

Lessing turned on him a suddenly brightening eye.

"That's the talk — say, you know I think I could get you forty-five hundred for that farm of yours anyway." They looked at one another on the verge of things hopeful and considerable. As Peter's car swung around the curve, suddenly they blushed, both of them, and reached out and shook hands.

That evening as Peter came home he saw Lessing buying chrysanthemums at the florist's with a happy countenance, and to master the queer pang it gave him, Peter got off the car and walked a long way out on the dim wet pavement. He was looking at the bright picture of Lessing and the girl — she was really very pretty — and seeing instead, himself, quite the bachelor, and his lame sister taking their blameless dull way in the world. He couldn't any more for the life of him, get a picture of himself without Ellen in it; the tapping of her crutch sounded even in the House when he visited it in his dreams. It was well on this occasion that he had Ellen beside him, for she showed him the way presently to take it, as he knew she would take it as soon as he went home and told her — as another door by which they could enter sym-

pathetically in the joyousness they were denied. She would be so pleased for Julian's sake, in whom, by Peter's account of him, she took the greatest interest, and so pleased for the girl to have such a handsome, capable lover. It made, for Ellen, a better thing of life if somebody could have him.

Peter went back after a while with that thought to the florist's and bought chrysanthemums, taking care to ask for the same kind Mr. Lessing had just ordered. He was feeling quite cheerful even, as he ran up the steps with them a few minutes later, and saw the square of light under the half-drawn curtain, and heard the tap of Ellen's crutch coming to meet him.

That night after he had gone to bed a very singular thing happened. The Princess out of the picture visited him. It was there at the foot of his bed in a new frame where Ellen had hung it—the young knight riding down the old, lumpy dragon, but with an air that Peter hadn't for a long time been able to manage for himself, doing a great thing easily the way one knew perfectly great things couldn't. The assistant sales manager of Siegel Brothers had

been lying staring up at it for some time when the Princess spoke to him. He knew it was she, though there was no face nor form that he could remember in his waking hours, except that it was familiar.

"Ellen is right," she told him; "it doesn't really matter so long as somebody finds me."

"But what have *I* done?" Peter was sore with a sense of personal slight. "It wasn't in the story that there should be a whole crop of dragons."

"All dragons are made so that where one head comes off there are seven in its place; and you must remember if somebody didn't go about slaying them, I couldn't be at all." This as she said it had a deep meaning for Peter that afterward escaped him. "And you can hold the dream. It takes a lot of dreaming to bring one like me to pass."

"I'm sick of dreams," said Peter. "A man dies after a little who is fed on nothing else."

"They die quicker if they stop dreaming; on those that have the gift for it the business of dreaming falls. Listen! How many that you know have found me?"

"A great many think they have; it comes to the same thing."

"The same for them; but you must see that I can never really *be* until I am for those outside the dream. The trouble with you is that you'd wake up after a while and you would *know*."

"Yes," Peter admitted, "I should know."

"Well, then," she was oh, so gentle about it, "yours is the better part. If you can't have me, at least you're not stopping me by leaving off for something else. In the dream I can live and grow, and you can grow to me. Do you remember what happened to Ada Harvey? I've saved you from that at any rate."

"No," said Peter, "it was the dragon saved me. I thought you were she. It's saved me from lots of things, now that I think of it."

"Ah, that's what we have to do between us, Peter, we have to save you. You're worth saving."

"Save me for what?" Peter cried out to her and so strongly in his loneliness that he found himself starting up from his bed with it. He could see the dragon spitting flames as before, and the pale light from the swinging street lamp

gilding the frame of the picture. Though he did not understand all that had happened to him, as he lay down again he was more comforted than he had been at any time since he had made up his mind that he was to be a bachelor.

PART FOUR

IN WHICH THE LOVELY LADY MAKES A FINAL APPEARANCE

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I

On the day that the silver-laced maple, then in fullest leaf, had passed by the space of three delicate palm-shaped banners the sill of the third-story office window, Lessing, of Weatheral, Lessing & Co., Brokers in Real Estate, crossed over to his partner's desk before sitting down at his own, and remained quietly leaning against it and looking out of the window without a word. He remained there staring out over the new, orderly growth of the suburb, toward the river, until the stenographer from the outer room had come in with the vase which she had been filling with great golden roses, and gone out again, after placing it carefully in the exact middle of the top of the junior partner's desk.

By that time Lessing's rather plump, practical hand had crept out along the rim of the desk until it was covered by Peter's lean one, and still neither of them had said a word. The roses had come in from Lessing's country place that morning in Lessing's car, and Lessing's wife had gathered them. There were exactly seventeen, full-blown and fragrant, and one small bud of promise which Peter presently removed from its vase to his button hole. The act had almost the significance of a ritual, a thing done many times with particular meaning.

"Somehow," Peter said as he fastened it with a pin underneath his lapel, "seventeen years seems a shorter time to look back on than to look forward to."

"Well, when we've put twenty-five years of work into it — and that's nothing to what we'll get into the next seventeen." Lessing's tone keyed admirably with the bright ample day outside, the rapid glint of the river and the tips of the maple all a-tremble with the urgency of new growth. The senior partner's eye roved from that to the restrained richness of the office

furniture from which the new was not yet worn, and returned to the contemplation of the towering white cumuli beginning to pile up beyond the farther bank of the river. "There's no end to what a man can lift," he asserted confidently, "once he's got his feet under him."

"We've carried a lot," Peter assented cheerfully, "and sometimes it was rather steep going, but now it's carrying us. The question is" — and here his voice fell off a shade and a slight gathering appeared between his eyes — "the real question is, I suppose, what it is carrying us *to*."

"Where's the good of that?" Julian protested. "It's only a limitation to set out for a particular place. The fun is in the going. You keep right along with the procession until old age gets you. The thing is just to keep it up as long as you can." He swung himself into a sitting posture on the edge of the desk and noted that the slight pucker had not left his partner's eyes. "What's the idea?" he wished affectionately to know.

"Oh, nothing much, but I sort of grew up with the idea of Duty — something you had to do because there was nobody else to do it.

You had not only to do it but you had to like it, not because it was likable, but because it was your duty. It was always right in front of me: I couldn't see over or around it; I just had to do it."

"Well, you did it," Lessing corroborated. "Clarice says the way you've taken care of Ellen ——"

"And the way Ellen has taken care of me — but then Ellen was all the woman I had." He caught himself up swiftly after that; it was seldom even to his partner that anything escaped him in reference to the interior life of dreams which had gone on in him, quite happily behind his undistinguished exterior. "But somehow it hasn't seemed to come out anywhere. I've done my duty . . . and when I'm dead and Ellen's dead, where is it? After all, what have I done?"

"Ah, look at Pleasanton," Julian reminded him; "do you call that nothing?" They looked together toward the esplanade along the river, beginning at this hour to be flecked with the white aprons of nurse-maids and their charges. "We've given them clean water to drink and

clean streets, and a safe place for the children to play in. The fight we had with the city council for *that* . . . !" He waved his arm again toward the well-parked river front. "Ever since I sold your farm for you and you began putting your money into the business, we've walked right along with it. Even before you left Siegel Brothers and we used to sit up nights with the map, planning where to put our money like a checker-board, we saw things like this for the town, and now we've made 'em true. And you say we've done nothing!" The senior partner was touched a little in his tenderest susceptibilities.

"Oh, well, " Peter admitted with a shamed laugh, "I suppose man is an incurable egotist. I was thinking of something more personal, something *mine*, the way a book or a picture belongs to the man who makes it."

"The game isn't over yet," Lessing reminded him, with a glance at the unfolding bud which Clarice had sent as a symbol of the opening year; "you're only forty. And, anyway, the money's yours; you made it." Something in the word recalled him to a thought that had

been earlier in his mind. "Clarice wanted me to ask you to-day if you had any idea how much you are worth."

Peter's attention came back from the window with a start. "Does that mean the Fresh Air Fund or the Association for the Protection of Ownerless Pups?"

Julian grinned. "Ownerless bachelors rather. Clarice has an idea you are well enough off to marry."

"If it were a proposition of my being married to Clarice I should consider myself well enough off without anything else ——" Peter dropped the light, accustomed banter for a sober tone. "How well off does your wife think I ought to be?"

"She's got it figured out that all you've spent on making Ellen comfortable for life isn't a patch on what she and the boys cost me, so it's high time you set about your natural destiny of making some woman happy."

"Look here, Julian, *is* it an object for a man to live for, making some woman happy?"

"Well, it keeps you on the jump all right," Lessing assured him. "What else is there?

It's a way of making yourself happy when you come to look at it; keeping her and the kids so that you leave the world better off than you found it. It suits *me*." He was looking, indeed, particularly well suited, in spite of a disposition to portliness and a suspicion of thinning hair, with what the seventeen years just past had brought him. A warm appreciation of what those things were touched his regard for his companion with a sober affectionateness. "I reckon Clarice is right: a wife and a couple of kids is the prescription for your case. That's why she wanted me to remind you that you could afford 'em."

"And has she named the day?" Peter wished to know whimsically.

"Oh, I say, Weatheral ——"

"My dear Julian, if I hadn't been able to see what Clarice has been up to for the last six months, at least I could have depended on Ellen to see it for me."

"She doesn't object, does she?"

"Oh, if you think the privilege of being aunt to your children has made up to her for not being aunt to mine ——"

"The privilege is on the other side. But anyway, I'm glad you got on to it. I didn't want to be a spoil sport. I suppose women's instincts can be trusted in these things, but I hated to see Clarice coming it over you blind."

Peter wondered to himself a little, which of the charming ladies to whom he had been introduced lately, Clarice had selected for him. He wasn't, however, concerned about her coming it blind over anybody but the senior partner who got down now from the desk, whistling softly and walking with a wide step as a man will in June when affairs go well with him, and he feels that if there are still some things which he desires he is able to get them for himself.

"Don't forget you're coming to us on Saturday; and we dine together to-night as usual."

"As usual." Always on the anniversary of their beginning business together Weatheral and Lessing, who were still, in spite of seeing one another daily for seventeen years, able to be interested in one another, dined apart from their families, savouring pleasantly that essential essence of maleness, the mutual power of work well accomplished. It was the best trib-

ute that Clarice and Ellen could pay to the occasion that they understood that, much as their several lives had profited by the partnership, they were still and naturally outside of it.

On this occasion, however, it was impossible for Peter to keep Mrs. Lessing out of the background of his consciousness, because of the part her suggestion of the morning played in new realization of himself as the rich Mr. Weatheral of Pleasanton. He credited her with sufficient knowledge of his character to have egged Julian on to the reminder as a part of the game she had played with him for the past two or three years, by which Peter was to be instated in a life more in keeping with his opportunities.

It was a game Clarice played with life everywhere, coaxing it to yield its choicest bloom to her. She had an instinct for choiceness like a hummingbird, darting here and there for sweetness. Her flutterings were never of uncertainty but such as kept her in the perfect airy poise. If she wanted marriage for Peter it was because she could imagine nothing better for anybody than a marriage like hers, and if

she chose this time for letting him know that she was thinking of it, it was because in those terms she could bring closest to him his new-found possibilities. If she could have reached Peter with the personal certainty of riches by explaining to him how far his dollars would stretch end to end, or how many acres of postage stamps he could buy with them, she might have thought less of him on that account, but she would have helped him to understanding even on those terms. You couldn't have made Clarice Lessing believe that whatever their limitations, people weren't entitled to help simply because they needed it.

It had come upon Peter by leaps and bounds during the last two or three years, both the wealth and the necessity of putting it to himself in terms of personal expression. During the first ten years of the partnership, the only use for money the simple needs of Ellen and himself had established was to put it back into the business; a use which had become almost an obligation during the time when both children and opportunity were coming to Julian faster than the cash to meet them. It was due

to the high ground that Clarice had made for them all out of what she and the children stood for, that Peter's superior cash contribution to the firm had become a privilege. They had had, he and Ellen, their stringent occasions; it had been Clarice's part to see that since they endured the pinch of poverty they should at least get something human out of it. It came out for Peter pleasantly as he walked home through the mild June evening, just how much they had had. Much, much more than they would have been able to buy with the money they might in strict equity have withdrawn from the business. Nothing, he had long admitted, that he could have purchased for his sister would have been so satisfying as what Clarice contributed, pressing the full cup of her motherhood to Ellen's thirsty lips. They might have grown sleek, he and Ellen, without exceeding a proper ratio of expenditure, and if in the end they had been a little less rich, they would still have had enough to go on being sleek and comfortable to the end. That he was still fit, as Mrs. Lessing's transparent efforts to marry him to her friends guaranteed him to be,

he felt was owing greatly to the terms on which Clarice had admitted him to the adventure of bringing up a family. That a special fitness was required for admission to Mrs. Lessing's circle he would have guessed even without the aid of print which consistently described it as Our Best Society, for it was a Best attested to by all the marks by which Clarice herself expressed the essential fineness of things.

One couldn't have told, from anything that appeared on the surface of the Lessing's social environment, that life did not proceed there as it did between Clarice and the Weatherals, by means of its subtler sympathies, and proceed, at least so far as the women were concerned, on a still higher plane of grace and harmony. It moved about her table and across the lawns of Lessing's handsome country place, with such soundless ease and perfection as it had glided for Peter through the House with the Shining Walls. Or at least so it had seemed on those occasions during the last few years when he had found himself wondrously inside it.

It had been accepted by Ellen on the mere certainty of Clarice's mother having been one

of the Thatcher Inwoods, that Clarice should enlarge her social borders with Lessing's increasing means until they included people among whom Ellen would have been miserably shy and out of tune. But not Ellen herself guessed how much of Peter's admission to its inaccessibility was owing to the returns from hardly snatched options and long-nursed opportunities, coming in in checks of six figures. Perhaps Clarice herself never knew. It was one of the things that went with being a Thatcher Inwood, wherever an occasion presented a handle of nobility, to seize by that and maintain it in the face of any contingent smallness. Clarice wouldn't have introduced Peter to her friends if he hadn't been fit, and it was part of the social creed of women like Clarice Lessing, which takes almost the authority of religion, that he wouldn't have been in a position to be introduced if he hadn't been fit. So it had happened for the past two years that Peter had found himself skirting the fringe of Best Society, and identifying it with the life he had lived so long, sitting with his book open on his knees in their little flat, with Ellen across the fire

from him knitting white things for Julian's children. But the idea that having come into this neighbourhood of fine appreciations he was to take up his home and live there, opened more slowly. It required more than one of Clarice's swift hummingbird darts, more than the flutter of suggestion to brush its petals awake for him.

It lay so deep under all the years, the power of loving. He knew almost nothing about it except that he had had it once, and that marriage without it would be unthinkable, even such a marriage as Mrs. Lessing had let him see was now possible to him. She had called with all her delicate friendly skill, on something which only now under that summons he began to miss. It was like a lost word in every sentence in which the ordinary hopes of men are to be read, and he felt that until he found it again all the help Mrs. Lessing could afford him would not enable him to think of marriage as a thing desirable in itself. It was missing in him still, when he came that night rather late to the apartment where only the Japanese houseboy awaited him. One of the first things he had

done for Ellen with his increasing means, had been to buy back for her the house at Bloombury with the garden and a bit of the orchard. She had been there now since Decoration Day, retiring more and more into the kindly village life as a point of vantage from which to mark with pride the social distance that Peter travelled from her. It had been understood from the beginning that she wasn't to go with him. The tapping of her crutch was no more to be heard in the new gracious existence than in the House where she had never followed him. Life for Ellen was lived close at hand. There were hollyhocks and currant bushes in her garden and Julian's children overran it.

It was not Ellen then that Peter missed as he sat alone in the house that night with his back to the lowered light and his gaze seeking the river and the flitting shapes of boats that went up and down on it, freighted with young voices and laughter. He missed the Lovely Lady. He knew now why he had not been able to think of marriage in the way Clarice held it out to him, as a happy contingency of his now being as rich as he had intended to be. It

was because he had not thought of her clearly for a long time.

There had been a period in the beginning of his life with Ellen, when the lady of his dreams had been so near the surface of all his thinking that she took on form and likeness from anything that was lovely and young in his neighbourhood, but as things lovely and young drifted from him with the years; and as the business took deeper and deeper hold on his attention, she had become a mere floating figment, a live fluttering spark in the very core of all his imaginings.

She had been beside him, a pleasant, indeterminate presence in the long journey she travelled from the printed page to the accompanying click of Ellen's needles. Sometimes at the opera she took on a gossamer tint from the singer's face, and longer ago than he could afford operas, he had understood that all the beauty of the world, bursting apple buds, the great curve of the surf that set the beaches trembling, derived somehow its pertinence from her. Now at the age of forty he had ceased to think very much about the Lovely Lady.

It occurred to him that this might have something to do with his failure to get a new relation to life out of his new wealth.

It had struck Peter rather forlornly during the past few years that there was little use he could put money to, except to make more money. He could see by turning his head to the room behind him how little there was there of what he had fancied once riches would bring him. The lines of the room were good, the amount of the annual rent assured that to him, the furniture was good and the rugs expensive. Ellen believed that money in rugs was a good investment, particularly if the colours were strong and would stand fading. There were some choice things here and there, a vase and pictures which Peter had chosen for himself, though he was aware, as he took them in under the dull glow, that Ellen had arranged them in strict reference to the size of the frames, and that the whole effect failed of satisfaction. He thought his life might be somewhat like that room, full of good things but lacking the touch that should set them in fruitful order. It stole over him as persuasively as the warm growing

smell of the park below him that the something missed might be the touch and presence of the Lovely Lady.

II

It was the late end of the afternoon when Peter stepped off the train at the Lessing's station and into the trap that was waiting for him. He learned from Lessing's man that the family had been kept by the tennis match at Maplemont and he was to come on to the house at his leisure. That being the case, Peter took the reins himself and made a long detour through the dust-smelling country roads, so that it was quite six when he reached the house, and everybody dressing for the early dinner.

He made so hasty a change himself in his fear of being late, that when he came down to the living-room in a quarter of an hour there was no one there to meet him. Absorbed particles of the bright day gave off in the dusk and made it golden. There were honeysuckles on the pergola outside, and in the room beyond a girl sing-

ing a quiet air, half-trilled and half-forgotten. He heard the singer moving toward him through the vacant house, of which the doors stood open to the evening coolness, and the click of the electric button as she passed, and saw the rooms burst one by one into the bloom of shaded lights. So she came, busy with the hummed fragments of her songs, and turned the lamp full on Peter before she was aware of him, but she was not half so much disconcerted.

"You must be Mr. Weatheral," she said. "Mrs. Lessing sent me to say she expected you. I am Miss Goodward."

She gave him her hand for a gracious moment before she turned to what had brought her so early down, the arrangement of two great bowls of wild ferns and vines which a servant had just placed on either end of the low mantlepiece.

"We brought them in from Archer's Glen on the way home," she told him over her shoulder, her hands busy with deft, quick touches. She was all in white, which took a pearly lustre from the lamps, and for the moment she was as beautiful as Peter believed her. A tiny un-

finished phrase of the song floated half consciously from her lips as a bubble. "They look better so, don't you think?" As she stood off to measure the effect, it seemed to Peter that the Spirit of the House had received him; it was so men dream of home-coming, without sensible displacement of a life going on in it, lovely and secure, as a bark slips into some still pool to its moorings. He yielded himself naturally to the impersonal intimacy of her welcome and all the sordid ways of his life led up to her.

It was not all at once he saw it so. He kept watching her all that evening as one watches a perfect thing, a bird or a dancer, sensing in the slim turn of her ankle, the lithe throat, the delicate perfume that she shook from her summer draperies, so many strokes of a master hand. She was evidently on terms with the Lessings which permitted her acceptance of him at the family valuation, but the perfection of her method was such that it never quite sunk his identity as the junior partner in his character of Uncle Peter.

This was a nuance, if Peter had but known it, which Eunice Goodward could have no more

missed than she could have eaten with her knife. She had been trained to the finer social adjustments as to a cult: Clarice's game of persuading life to present itself with a smiling countenance, played all in the key of personal relations. It was as if Nature, having tried her hand at a great many ordinary persons, each with one gift of sympathy or graciousness, had culled and compacted the best of them into Eunice Goodward; which was precisely the case except that Peter through his unfamiliarity with the Best Society couldn't be expected to know that the intelligence which had put together so much perfectness was no less calculating than that which goes to the matching of a string of pearls. All that he got from it was precisely all that he was meant to receive — namely, the conviction that she couldn't have charmed him so had she not been altogether charming.

And as yet he did not know what had happened to him. He thought, when he awoke in the morning to a new realization of the satisfactoriness of living, that the fresh air had done it, the breath of the nearby untrimmed forest, the loose-leaved roses pressed against the pane

beginning to give off warm odours in the sun. Then he came out on the terrace and saw Eunice Goodward, looking like a thin slip of the morning herself, in a blue dress buttoned close to her figure with wide white buttons and a tiny froth of white at the short sleeves and open throat. Across her bosom it was caught with a blue stone set in dull silver, which served also to hold in place a rose that matched the morning tint of her skin. She was talking with the Lessings' chauffeur as Peter came up with her and all her accents were of dismay. They were to have driven over to Maplemont that afternoon, she explained to Peter, for the last of the tennis sets, and now Gilmore had just told her that the car must go to the shop for two or three days. She was so much more charming in the way she forgave Gilmore for her evident disappointment that he, being a young man and troubled by a sense of moral responsibility, was quite overcome by it.

"But, nonsense"; Peter was certain "there is always something can be done to cars." There was, Gilmore assured him, but it took time to do it, and to-morrow would be Sunday.

"If you'd only thought to come down in the motor yourself, sir ——" the chauffeur reproached him. The truth was that Peter hadn't a car of his own and Gilmore knew it. There was an electric runabout which had gone down to Bloombury with Ellen, and a serviceable roadster which was part of the office equipment, but the rich Mr. Weatheral had never taken the pains to own a private car. Now, as he hastily drew out his watch, it occurred to him that Lessing's chauffeur was a fellow of more perspicuity than he had given him credit for. The two men communicated wordlessly across the cool width of the terrace steps.

"At what hour," Peter wished to know, "would we have to leave here to reach Maplemont in good time? Then if you can be ready to leave the moment my car gets here . . ." He excused himself to go to the telephone; half an hour later when he joined the family at breakfast he had discovered some of the things that, besides making more money with it, can be done with money.

The knowledge suited him like his own garment, as if it had been lying ready for him to

put on when the occasion required it, and now became him admirably. He perceived it to be a proper male function to produce easily and with precision whatever utterly charming young ladies might reasonably require. He appreciated Miss Goodward's acceptance of it as she came down from the house bewilderingly tied into soft veils for the afternoon's drive, as a part of her hall-marked fineness. If she couldn't help knowing, taking in the car's glittering newness from point to point, that its magnificence had materialized out of her simple wish for it, she at least didn't allow him to think it was any more than she would have expected of him. So completely did he yield himself to this new sense of the fitness of things that it came as a shock to have her, as soon as they had joined themselves to the holiday-coloured crowd that streamed and shifted under the bright boughs of Maplemont, reft from him by friendly, compelling voices, and particularly by Burton Henderson, who played singles and went about bareheaded and singularly self-possessed. It was unthinkable to Peter that, in view of her recently discovered

importance in putting him at rights with himself, that he hadn't arranged with her that they were to be more together. For the moment it was almost a derogation of her charm that she shouldn't herself have recognized by some overt act her extraordinary opportunity. And then in a moment more he perceived that she had recognized it. He had only to wait, as he saw, and he would find himself pleasantly beside her, and at each renewal of the excluding companionship, he was more subtly aware that it was accorded not to anything he was but to what she had it in her power so beautifully to make of him.

So perfectly did she strike the key with him, when, in the intervals of the afternoon's entertainment they found themselves sitting or walking together, that he could not have imagined her to have been out of it, not even in a rather long session after tea with Burton Henderson among the rhododendrons, in which it was apparent from the young man's manner that she hadn't at least been in tune with him. It occurred just as they were leaving and served in the flutter of delay it occasioned to fix the

attention of all their party on Eunice coming out of the shrubbery with young Henderson in her wake, batting aimlessly at the grass-tops with the racquet which he still carried. There was an air of sulkiness about him which caused Mrs. Lessing enigmatically to say that Eunice was altogether too good to that young man. To which Lessing's "Well, if she is, he doesn't seem to appreciate," served also to confirm Peter in the rôle which the effect she produced on himself had created for him. He at least appreciated the way in which she had made him feel himself the Distributer of Benefits, to a degree which made it almost obligatory of her to go on with it.

Successfully as Miss Goodward had kept for Peter during the day his new relation to his wealth on the one hand and society on the other, she seemed that evening quite to have abandoned him. While the family was having coffee on the terrace after dinner, she slipped away from them to reappear lower down among the rose trees, her white dress gathering all that was left of the lingering glow. The junior partner, feeling himself never so much junior,

though he knew it was but a scant year or two, sat on through Lessing's inconsequential comment on business and the day's adventures, hearing not a word; now and then his chair creaked with the intensity of his preoccupation. It grew dusk and the lamps blossomed in the house behind them; presently Clarice slipped away to the children and the evening damp fell over the rose garden. Peter could endure it no longer. He believed as he rose suddenly with a stretching movement that he meant merely to relieve the tension of sitting by pacing up and down; it was unaccountable therefore that he should find himself at the edge of the terrace. He wondered why on earth Clarice couldn't have helped him a little, and then as if in response to his deep instinctive demand upon her, he heard her call softly to her husband from the door of the house. At the scrape of Julian's chair on the terrace tiling, Peter cast away his cigar and hurried into the dusk of the garden.

He found her at last by the herbacious border, keeping touch with the flight of a sphinx-head moth along the tall white rockets of phlox. Peter whipped out his handkerchief and

dropped it deftly over the fluttering wings. In a moment he had stilled them in his hand. Miss Goodward cried out to him:

"You've spoiled his happy evening!"

"He's not hurt. . . ." Peter laid the moth gently on a feathery flower head, and the tiny whispering whirr began again. "I thought you wanted him."

"I did — but not to catch him," Miss Goodward explained. "I wanted just to want him."

"Ah, I'm afraid I'm one of those people with whom to want a thing is to go after it," Peter justified himself.

"So one gathers from what one hears." She brushed him as lightly with the compliment as with the wings of a moth. "I wasn't really wanting him so much as I was wanting to *be* him for a while. Just to pass from one lovely hour to another and nothing to pay! But we humans have always to pay something."

"Or some one pays for us."

"Well, isn't that worse . . . taking it out of somebody else?"

"I'm not so sure; some people enjoy paying.

It's not a bad feeling, I assure you: being able to pay. Haven't you found that out yet?"

"Not in Trethgarten Square." Mrs. Lessing had managed to let him know during the day that her guest had been reared within the sacred pale of those first families in whom the choice stock of humanness is refined by being maintained at precisely the same level for at least three generations.

"In Trethgarten Square," Peter reminded her, "we are told that you settle your account just by *being;* that you manage somehow to become something so superior and delectable that the rest of us are willing to pay for the privilege of having you about." He would have liked to add that recently, no later in fact than the evening before, he had come to think that this was so, but as she hesitated in her walk beside him, he saw that she was concerned in putting the case to herself quite as much as to him.

"It's not that exactly; more perhaps that our whole thought about life is to live it so that there won't be anything to pay. We have to manage to add things up like a column of figures with

nothing to carry. Perhaps that's why we get so little out of it."

"Don't you?"—he was genuinely surprised, "get anything out of it, I mean."

"Oh, but I'm a selfish beast, I suppose! I want more — more!" They swung as she spoke into a broad beam of yellow light raying out from the library window, and he saw by it that with the word she flung out her arms with a lovely upward motion that lifted his mood to the crest of audacity.

"If you keep on looking like that," Peter assured her, "you'll get it." He was struck dumb immediately after with apprehension. It sounded daring, like a thing said in a book; but she took it as it came lightly off the tip of his impulse, laughing. "Yes . . . the great difficulty is choosing which of so many things one really wants." They walked on then in silence, the air darkling after the sudden shaft of illumination, the light folds of her scarf brushing his sleeve. Peter was considering how he might say, without precipitation, how suddenly she had limited and defined all the things that he wanted by expressing them

so perfectly in herself, when she interrupted him.

"There's our moth again," she pointed; "he settles it by taking all of them. It's a possibility denied to us."

"Even he," Peter insisted, "has to reckon with such incidents as my dropping on him just now. I might have wanted him for a collection."

"Oh, if he takes us into account it must be as men used to think of the gods walking." Suddenly the familiar beds and hedges widened for Peter; they stretched warm and tender to the borders of youth and the unmatched Wonder. . . . It was so they had talked when they walked together in the Garden which was about the House. . . .

For some time after Miss Goodward left him Peter remained walking up and down, thinking of many things and unable to think of them clearly because of a pleasant blur of excitement in his brain. As he came finally back to the house he heard the Lessings talking from behind one of the open windows.

"My word, that car was never out of the shop before," Julian was saying. "He's a *goner!*"

"And that lovely, dusty, brown colour that goes so well with her hair! Who would have thought Peter would be so noticing."

"It couldn't have cost him a cent under seven thousand." Julian was certain, "and carrying it off with me the way he did — bought the six cylinder after all, he had . . . I'll bet old Peter don't know a cylinder from a stomach pump."

Clarice was evidently going on with her own line of thought. "It will be the best thing that ever happened to Eunice if she can only be got to see it."

"Well, if she don't her mother will see it for her." Lessing's voice died into a subdued chuckle as Peter passed under it on the dew-damp lawn, but there was no revelation in it for the junior partner. He had already found out what was the matter with him and what he meant to do about it.

III

Whatever the process of becoming engaged to Eunice Goodward lacked of dramatic interest,

it made up to Peter by being such a tremendous adventure for him to become engaged to anybody.

He had gone through life much as his unfriended youth had strayed through the city streets, aching for the walled-up splendour — all the world's chivalries, tendernesses, passions — known to him only by glimmers and reflections on the plain glass of duty. Now at a word the glass dissolved and he was free to wander through the rooms crammed with imperishable poets' wares. He walked there not only as one who has the price to buy, but himself made one of the splendid things of earth by this same word which her mere being pronounced to him.

He paid himself for years of denials and repressions by the discovery of being able to love in such a key. For he meant quite simply to marry Eunice Goodward if she would have him, and it was no vanity which gave him hope, but a tribute to her fineness as being able to see herself so absolutely the one thing his life waited for. He knew himself, modestly, no prize for her except as he was added to by

inestimable passion. Whatever she saw in him as a man, for her not to recognize the immortal worth of what he was able to become under her hand, was to subtract something from her perfections. In her acceptance would lie the Queen's touch, redeeming him from all commonness.

He made his first venture within a week after their first meeting, in a call on Miss Goodward and her mother in Trethgarten Square, where he found their red brick, vine-masked front distinguishable among half a hundred others by being kept open as late as the middle of June. To their being marooned thus in a desert of boarded-up doors and shuttered windows, due, as Eunice had frankly and charmingly let him know, to their being poor among their kind, he doubtless owed it that no other callers came to disturb the languid afternoon. Seen against her proper background of things precious but worn, and in the style of a preceding generation, the girl showed even lovelier than before, with the rich, perfumed quality of a flower held in a chipped porcelain vase, a flower moreover secure in its own perfectness, waiting only to be

worn, disdaining alike to offer or resist. Her very quietness — she left him, in fact, almost wholly to her mother — had the air of condoning his state, of understanding what he was there for and of finding it somehow an accentuation of the interest they let him see that he had for them. He found them, mother and daughter, more alike, in spite of their natural and evident difference of years, more of a degree than he was accustomed to find mother and daughters in the few houses where the business of growing rich had admitted him, as though they had been carved out of the same material, by the same distinguished artist, at different times in his career.

It contributed to the effect of his having found, not by accident, but by seeking, a frame of life kept waiting for him, kept warm and conscious. Presently Eunice poured tea for them, and the intimacy of her remembering as she did, how he took it, had its part in the freedom which he presently found for offering hospitality on his own account, not at his home, as he explained to them, his sister being away, but say a dinner at Briar Crest to which they might

motor out pleasantly Saturday afternoon, returning by moonlight. He offered Briar Crest tentatively on the strength of the Lessings having once given a dinner there, and was relieved to find that he had made no mistake.

"A great many of your friends go there," Mrs. Goodward allowed; "the Van Stitarts, Eunice, you remember."

"The Gherberdings are there now, mamma; I'm sure we shall enjoy it."

Having crossed thus at one fortunate stroke the frontiers of social observance, to which Clarice had but edged her way in the right of being a Thatcher Inwood, Peter ventured on Friday to suggest by telephone that since dinner must be late, the ladies should meet him at what he had taken pains to ascertain was the correct one of huge uptown hotels, for tea before starting. It was Mrs. Goodward who answered him and she whom he met in the white, marble tessellated tea-room, explaining that Eunice had had some shopping to do — they were really leaving on Saturday — and Mr. Weatheral was to order tea without waiting. They had time, however, for the tea

to be drunk and for Mrs. Goodward to become anxious in a gentle, ladylike way, before it occurred to Peter to suggest that Miss Goodward might be lurking anywhere in the potted palm and marble pillared labyrinth, waiting for *them*, suffering equal anxieties, and dreadful to think of in their present replete condition, languishing for tea. His proposal to go and look for her was accepted with just the shade of deprecation which admitted him to an amused tolerance of the girl's delinquencies, as if somehow Eunice wouldn't have dared to be late with him had she not had reason more than ordinary for counting on his indulgence.

"You'll find," Mrs. Goodward let him know, "that we require a deal of looking after, Eunice and I."

"Ah, I only hope you'll find that I'm equal to it." Peter had answered her with so little indirection that it drew from the older woman a quick, mute flush of sympathy. For a moment the homeliness of his lean countenance was relieved with so redeeming a touch of what all women most wish for in all men that she met it with an equal simplicity. "For myself I am

sure of it," but lifted next moment to a lighter key, with a smile very like her daughter's dragged a little awry by the use of years, "as for Eunice, you'll first have to lay hands on her."

With this permission he rose and made the circuit of the semi-divided rooms, coming out at last into the dim rotunda, forested with clustered porphyry columns, and there at last he caught sight of her. She had but just stepped into its shaded coolness out of the hot, bright day, and hung for a moment, in the act of furling her parasol, in which he was about to hail her, until he discovered by his stepping into range from behind one of the green pillars, that she was also in the act of saying good-bye to Burton Henderson. There was a certain finality in the way she held out her hand to him which checked Peter in the hospitable impulse to include the younger man in the afternoon's diversion. He stepped back the moment he saw that she was having trouble with her escort, defending herself by her manner from something accusing in his. Not to seem to spy upon her, Weatheral made his way back though the coat-

room without disclosing himself. From the door of it he timed his return so as to meet her face to face as she came up with Mrs. Goodward and was rewarded for it by the gayety of her greeting and the unaffectedness of her attack of the fresh relay of toasted muffins and tea.

"Absolutely famished," she told them, "and the shops are *so* fascinating! You'd forgive me, Mr. Weatheral, if you could see the heaps and heaps of lovely things simply begging to be bought; it seemed positively unkind to come away and leave any of them." As she said nothing whatever about the young man, it seemed unlikely that she could have him much on her mind. She had a new way, very charming to Peter, of surrendering the afternoon into his hands; let him ask nothing of her she seemed to say, but to enjoy herself. She built out of their being there before her, a very delightful supposition of her mother and Mr. Weatheral, between them having made a little space for her to be gay in and simple and lovely after her own kind. If she took any account of them it was such as a dancer might who, practising

a few steps for the mere joy and pride of it, finds herself unexpectedly surrounded by an interested and smiling audience.

If, however, with the memory of that afternoon upon him, Peter had gone down to Fairport in the latter part of July with the expectation of resuming the part of impresario to her charm, he suffered a sharp disappointment. He found the Goodwards, not in the expensive caravansary in which he installed himself, but in a smaller tributary house set back from the main hotel though not quite disconnected with it; for quiet, Mrs. Goodward told him, though he guessed quite as much from economy.

"It's wonderful, really, what they do with so little," Clarice, with her fine discriminations in the obligations of friendship, had generously let him know. "Eunice hasn't anything, positively not *any*thing in comparison with what people of her class usually have. And with her taste, you know, there must be things she's just aching for, that somehow you can't give her." You couldn't, indeed. Though Peter made excuses enough for giving her the use of his car, and giving it to her shorn even of the im-

plication of his society, there were few occasions when he could do even so much as that. He couldn't even give her his appreciations.

For at Fairport the Goodwards were quite in the heart of all that Peter himself failed to understand that he couldn't possibly be. It was not that he wasn't to the extent at least of sundry invitations given and accepted, "in" as much of the Best Society as Fairport afforded. Mrs. Goodward saw to that, and there were two or three whom he had met at the Lessings' as well as men to whom the figure of his income was the cachet of eligibility. It wasn't indeed that he wasn't liked, and that quite at his proper worth, but that he couldn't somehow manage it so that the Best Society cared in the least whether he liked it. He could see, in a way, where Clarice had been at work for him; but the poison that was dropped in his cup was the certainty that the way for him had to be "worked." The discovery that he couldn't just find his way to Eunice Goodward's side by the same qualities that had placed him beside the males of her circle in point of property and power, that he couldn't

without admission to that circle, properly court her, hemmed him in bewilderingly.

Her method of eluding him, if there were method in it, left him feeling not so much avoided as prevented by the moves of a game he hadn't meant to play. So greatly it irked his natural simplicity to be banded about by the social observances of the place, that it might have led him to irrecoverable mistakes had it not been for the hand held out to him by Mrs. Goodward.

He perceived on closer acquaintance, that this lady's fine serenity of manner was due largely to her never admitting to her mind the upsetting possibility. She thought her world into acceptable shape and held it there by the simple process of ignoring the eccentricities of its axis.

Peter would have admired, if his unsophistication had allowed him, the facility with which she made it revolve now about their mutual pursuit of Eunice through the rattle and cheapness of what was known as "the Burton Henderson set." As it was against just such social inconsequence that Peter felt himself strong to defend her, he fell easily into the key of credit-

ing the girl's sudden, bewildering flight to it as a mere midsummer madness.

"It's the way with girls, I fancy," Mrs. Goodward had said to him, strolling up and down the hotel veranda where through the wide French windows they had glimpses of Eunice whirling away on the ice polished floor of the ballroom within; "they cling the more to gayety as they see the graver things of life bearing down upon them."

"You think she sees that?"

"Ah, there's much a mother sees, Mr. Weatheral ——"

"You would, of course," he accepted.

"It's a woman's part, seeing; there's an instinct in us not to see too soon." She gave him the benefit of her sweet weighted smile.

Peter lived greatly on these things. He was so sure of himself, of the reality and strength of his passion; he had a feeling of its being quite enough for them to go on, an inexhaustible, fairy capital out of which almost anything that Eunice Goodward desired might be drawn. It was fortunate that he found his passion so self-sufficing, for there was little enough that Eunice

afforded it by way of sustenance. For a week he no more than kept in sight of her in the inevitable summer round; he did not dance and the game of cards he could play was gauged to what Ellen could manage in an occasional quiet evening at the Lessings'.

"I suppose," Eunice had said to him on an occasion when he had known enough to decline an invitation for an afternoon's play to which Burton Henderson was carrying her away, "that the stakes we play for aren't any temptation to *you*."

"I think that they're out of proportion to the trouble you have to be at to win them."

"Oh, if you don't care for the game ——"

"I don't." And then casting about for a phrase that explained him more happily, "Put it that I like to cut out my job and go to it." She gave him a quick, condoning flash of laughter; the phrase was Lessing's and out of her recognition of it he drew, loverlike, that assurance of common understanding so dear to lovers. "Put it," he ventured further, "that I don't like to see myself balked of the prize by the way the cards are dealt."

"Ah, but that's what makes it a game. I'd no idea you were such a — revolutionist."

"Evolutionist," he corrected, happy in having touched the subtler note behind their persiflage. "I've all science on my side for the most direct method." After all, why should he let even the Best Society deal the cards for him? Should not a man sweep the boards of whatever kept him from his natural mate?

That was on Tuesday, and the Thursday following he had asked the Goodwards to motor over to Lighthouse Reef with him. He did not know quite what he meant to bring about on this occasion; he had so much the feeling of its being an occasion, the invitation had been so pointedly given and accepted, it was with difficulty he adjusted himself to the discovery on arriving at their hotel with the car, that Eunice had gone to play tennis instead.

"The time is so short," Mrs. Goodward apologized; "she felt she must make the most of it." She had to leave it there, not being able to make a game of tennis in the hot sun seem more of a diversion than the steady pacing of the luxurious car along the road which laced the

forest to the singing beaches. She had to let her sidewise smile do what it could toward making the girl's bald evasion of her engagement seem the mere flutter and hesitancy of besieged femininity. For the moment she was as much "outside" so far as her daughter was concerned as Peter was of the select bright circle in which she moved.

The way opened before them, beautiful in late bloom and heavy fern, above which the sea wind kept a perpetual movement of aliveness.

"Eunice *will* miss it," Mrs. Goodward rallied; "such a perfect afternoon!" She gave him the oblique smile again, weighted this time with the knowledge of all that Peter hadn't been able or hadn't tried to keep from her. "It isn't easy, is it," she went on addressing her speech to whatever, at the mention of her daughter's name, hung in the air between them, "to stand by and see other people's great moments hover over them. One would like so to lend a hand. And one is sure of nothing so much as that if they are really to *be* big, one mustn't."

"If you feel that," Peter snatched at encouragement, "that it is really the big thing for

her — what I'm sure you can't help knowing what I mean — what I hope."

"What *I* feel ——? After all, it's *her* feeling, my dear Mr. Weatheral, that we have to take into account. It wouldn't be fair for me to attempt to answer to you for that!"

"And of course if I can't *make* her feel . . ." He did not trust himself to a conclusion.

They found, however, when the road issued on the coast opposite the great bursting bulks of spray, that Eunice's desertion and the extenuation of it to which they had lent themselves, had put them out of the mood for the high wind and warring surf of the Reef. Accordingly they turned aside at Peter's suggestion to have tea at a little country inn farther back in the hills, where the pound of the sea was reduced to a soft, organ-booming bass to which the shrill note of the needles countered in perfect tune. The tea garden, the favourite port of call for afternoon drives from the resorts hereabouts, lay back of the hostelry in a narrow, ferny glen from which springs issued. As Peter led the way up its rocky stair, they could hear

the light laughter of a party just rising from one of the round rustic tables. The group descending poured past them a summer-coloured runnel down the little glen, and left them face to face with Eunice, who had lingered, her dress caught on a point of the rustic chair.

"Mamma — you!" She looked trapped, accused, though sheer astonishment held the others dumb. "We finished the game ——" she began and stopped short; after all, her manner seemed to say, why shouldn't she have tea there with her friends? She made as if to sweep past after them but Mrs. Goodward never moved from the narrow path. She was more embarrassed, Peter saw, than her daughter, and as plainly at bay.

"Now that we are here ——" she began in her turn.

"Now that you have followed me here," the girl rang out, "what is it that you have to say to me?" She was white and a bright flame spot showed on either cheek.

"I — oh," the elder woman by an effort drew the remnant of the grand manner about her; "it is Mr. Weatheral, I think, who might have

something to say." She caught the occasion as it were on the wing. Peter heard the quick breath behind him with which she grasped it. "Now that you are here, however, I'll tell your party that you will be driving home with us." She gathered up her draperies and was gone down the path she had come before either of the others thought to stop her. Eunice had not made a move to do so. She stood clasping the back of the chair from which she had freed her dress, and looked across it mutinously at Peter.

"And what," she quivered, "has Mr. Weatheral to say to me?"

"There is nothing," he told her, "that I would say to you, Miss Goodward, unless you wished to hear it." His magnanimity shamed her a little.

"I broke my engagement to you," she admitted, "broke it to come here with — the others. I haven't any excuse to offer you."

"And when," Peter demanded of her, "have I asked any other excuse of you for anything that you chose to do except that you chose it. There *was* something I wished to say to you, that I hoped for a more auspicious occasion. . . ."

He hurried on with it suddenly as a thing to be got over with at all hazards. "It was to say that I hoped you might not find it utterly beyond you to think of marrying me." He saw her sway a little, holding still to her chair, and moved toward her a step, dizzy himself with the sudden onset of emotion. "But now that it is said, if it distresses you we will say no more about it." She waved him back for a moment without altering her strained, trapped attitude.

"Have you said this to mamma? And has she — has she said anything to you? About me, I mean; how I might take it, or anything?"

"She said that she couldn't answer for you; that it was your feeling that must be taken into account. She put me, so to speak, on my own feet in so far as *that* was concerned." He waited for her answer to that, and none coming, though he saw that she grew a little easier, he went on presently. "There is, however, much that I feel ought to be said about my feeling for you, what it means to me, what I hoped ——" She stopped him with a gesture; he could see her lovely manner coming back to her as quiet comes to the surface of a smitten pool.

"That — one may take for granted, may one not? Since you *have* asked me, that the feeling that goes to it is all I have a right to ask?"

"Quite, quite," he assured her. "It may be," he managed to smile upon her here for the easing of her sweet discomposure, "it may very easily be that I was thinking too much of my pleasure in saying it."

"It would, then, be a pleasure?" She had the air of snatching at that as something concrete, graspable.

"It would, and it wouldn't. I mean if you were bothered by it. You could take everything for granted, everything."

"Even," she insisted, "to the point of taking it for granted that you would take things for granted from me: that you wouldn't expect anything — any expression, anything more than just accepting you?"

"Ah!" he cried, the wonder, the amazement of success breaking upon him. "If you accepted me what more *could* I expect." He had clasped the hand which she held out to check him and held it against his heart firmly that she shouldn't see how he trembled.

"I haven't, you know," she reminded him, "but if I was sure — very sure that you wouldn't ask any more of me than thinking, I . . . might think about it." She was trembling now, though her hand was so cold, and suddenly a tear gathered and dropped, splashing her fine wrist.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" he cried, moved more than he had thought it possible to be; "you can be perfectly sure that there will never be anything between you and me that shall not be exactly as you wish." He suited his action to the word, kissing the wet splash and letting her go.

"Why, then," she recovered herself with the smile that was now strangely like her mother's, sweeter for being smiled a little awry, "the best thing you can do is to find poor mamma and let us give her a cup of tea."

IV

"Peter, have you any idea what I am thinking about?"

"Not in the least, Ellen," which was not

strictly the truth. He supposed she must be thinking naturally of the news he had told her not an hour since, of his engagement to Eunice Goodward. It lay so close to the surface of his own mind at all times that the slightest stir of conversation, like the wind above a secret rose, seemed always about to disclose it. They were sitting on the porch at Bloombury and the pointed swallows pitched and darted about the eaves.

"It was the smell of the dust that reminded me," said Ellen, "and the wild rose at the turn of the road; you can smell it as plain as plain when the air lifts a little. Do you remember a picnic that we were invited to and couldn't go? It was on account of being poor . . . and I was just finding it out. I found out a good many things that summer; about my always going to be lame and what it would mean to us. It was dreadful to me that I couldn't be lame just by myself, but I had to mix up you and mother in it."

"We were glad, Ellen, to be mixed up in it if it made things easier for you."

"I know . . . times I felt that way

about it too, but that was when I was older . . . as if it sort of held us all together; like somebody who had belonged to us all and had died. Only it was me that died, the me that would have been if I hadn't been lame. . . . Well, I hadn't thought it out so far that first summer; I just hated it because it kept us from doing things like other people. You were fond of Ada Brown, I remember, and it was because I was lame and we were so poor and all, that you couldn't go with her and she got engaged to Jim Harvey. I hope you don't think I have a bad heart, Peter, but I was always glad that Ada didn't turn out very well. Every time I saw her getting homelier and kind of bedraggled like, I said to myself, well, I've saved Peter from that at any rate. I couldn't have borne it if she had turned out the kind of a person you ought to have married."

"You shouldn't have worried, Ellen; very few men marry the first woman they are interested in."

"There was a girl you used to write home about — at that boarding-house. I used to get you to write. I daresay you thought I was

just curious. But I was trying to find out something that would make me perfectly sure she wasn't good enough for you. She was a typewriter, wasn't she?"

"Something of that sort."

"Well!" Ellen took him up triumphantly, "you wouldn't have wanted to be married to a typewriter *now!*"

"I never really thought of marrying one, Ellen. I'm sure everything has turned out for the best."

"That's what I'm trying to tell you. You see I was determined it should turn out that way. I said, what was the use of being lame and being a burden to you unless there was something *meant* by it. I'd have fretted dreadfully if I hadn't felt that there was something to come out of it. And it has come . . . Peter, you'd rather I'd saved you for this than anything that might have happened?"

"Much rather, Ellen."

It had surprised him in the telling, to see how accurately his sister had gauged the worldly advantage of his marriage. If Eunice Goodward had been a piece of furniture, Ellen

couldn't have appraised her better at her obvious worth: beauty and character and family and the mysterious cachet of society. Clarice had been at work there, too, he suspected. Miss Goodward fitted in Ellen's mind's eye into her brother's life and fortune as a picture into its frame.

"I'm very glad you feel that way about it, Ellen" he said again; he was on the point of telling her about the House of Shining Walls. The material from which he had drawn its earliest furnishings lay all about them, the receding blue of the summer sky, the aged, arching apple boughs. The scent of the wilding rose came faintly in from the country road — suddenly his sister surprised him with a flash of rare insight.

"I guess there can't anything keep us from the best except ourselves," she said. "Being willing to put up with the second best gives us more trouble than the Lord ever meant for us. Think of the way I've always wanted children — but if they'd been my real own, they'd have been sickly, likely, or even lame like me, or just ordinary like the only kind of man who would

have married me. As it is, I've had Clarice's and now ——" She broke off with a quick, old-maidish colour.

Ellen had gone so far as to name all of Peter's children in the days when nothing seemed so unlikely; now in the face of his recent engagement she would have thought it indelicate.

"*She* would have liked you marrying so well, Peter," she finished with a backward motion of her head toward the room where the parlour set, banished long ago from the town house, symbolized for Ellen the brooding maternal presence.

"Yes, she would have liked it." There came back to him with deep satisfaction his mother's appraisement of young Mrs. Dassonville, who must, as he recalled her, have been shaped by much the same frame of life as Eunice Goodward — the Lovely Lady. The long unused phrase had risen unconsciously to his lips on the day that he had brought Eunice her ring. He had spent a whole week in the city choosing it; three little flawless, oblong emeralds set with diamonds, almost encircling her finger with the mystic number seven. He had discovered on the day that she had accepted him, that it had

to be emeralds to match the green lights that her eyes took on in the glen from the deep fern, the mossy bank and the green boughs overhead. On the terrace at Lessings' under a wide June sky he had supposed them to be blue; but there was no blue stone of that sky colour of sufficient preciousness for Eunice Goodward.

She had been very sweet about the ring, touched with grateful surprise for its beauty and its taste. Something he could see of relief, of assurance, flashed and fell between the two women as she showed it to her mother. They had taken him so beautifully on trust, they couldn't have known, he reflected, whether he would rise at all to the delicate, balanced observation of life among them; it was evidence, the emerald circlet, of how satisfyingly he had risen. The look that passed between mother and daughter was like a spark that lighted as it fell, an unsuspected need of him as man merely, the male element, security, dependability, care. His first response to it was that of a swimmer who has struck earth under him; he knew in that flash where he was, by what familiar shores; and the whole effect, in spite of him was

of the sudden shrinkage of that lustrous sea in which his soul and sense had floated. It steadied him, but it also for the moment narrowed a little the horizon of adventure. It was the occasion that Eunice took to define for him his status as an engaged man.

He kept as far as he was able his compact of expecting nothing of her, except of course that he couldn't avoid expecting that their arrangement would lead in the natural course to marriage. She had met him more than halfway in that, agreeing to an earlier date than he had thought compatible with the ritual of engagements in the Best Society. She had managed, however, that Peter should present her with her summer freedom: the engagement was not even to be announced until their return to town. And in the meantime Peter was to find a house. He had offered her travel for that first year. Europe, which he had scarcely glimpsed, glittered and allured. But travel, Eunice let him know, went much better when you had a place to come back to. He saw at once how right was everything she did. Well, then, a house on Fillmore Avenue?

"Oh — shall we be so rich as that, Peter?" He divined some embarrassment in her as to the scale in which they were to live. "We'll want something in the country, too," she reminded him.

"I've a couple of options at Maplemont ——"

"Oh, Maplemont ——" She liked that also, he perceived.

"And a place in Florida. Lessing and I bought it the winter the children had the diphtheria. They've a very pretty bungalow; we could put up something like it for ourselves — if you wouldn't mind my sister occasionally. Ellen isn't happy at hotels."

"Mind! with all you're giving me! You won't think it's just the money, Peter;" she had a very charming hesitancy about it. "It's what money stands for, beauty, and suitability — and — everything." He was very tender with her.

"It's not that I have such a pile of it either," he assured her, "though I turn over a great deal in the course of a year. It's easier making money than people think."

"Easier for everybody?" There was a certain eagerness in the look and voice.

"Easier for those who know how. I'm only forty, and I've learned; there's not much I couldn't get if I set about it. It's a kind of a gift, perhaps, like painting or music, but there's a great deal to be learned, too."

"And some haven't the gift to learn, perhaps." For some reason she sighed. . . . He was turning all this over in his mind when suddenly Ellen recalled him.

"Have you told Clarice yet?"

"I mean to, Sunday, if you don't mind my not coming down to you. Miss Goodward is spending the week end at Maplemont, and by staying at Julian's ——"

"Of *course*." Ellen sympathized. "I shall want to know what Clarice says." She never did know exactly, for when Clarice gave Peter her congratulations in the terrace garden after dinner, she missed, extraordinarily for her, the felicitous note.

"I'm so happy for Eunice, you can't imagine," she insisted. "I've always said we've none of us known what Eunice can do until she's had her opportunity. And now with all the background you can give her —— You'll see!"

He didn't quite know what he was to see except that if Eunice were to be in the picture it was bound to be satisfying. But Mrs. Lessing was not done with him. "For all her being so beautiful and so well placed," she went on, "Eunice has never had any life at all, not what you might call a life. And she might so easily have missed this. It is hard for girls to realize sometimes that the success of marriage depends on real qualities in the man, in mastery over things and not just over her susceptibilities. It is quite the most sensible thing I've known Eunice to do."

"Only," Peter reminded her for his part, "I'm not just exactly doing it because it is sensible." Her "of course not" was convinced enough to have stilled the vague ruffling of his mind, without doing it. He didn't object to having his qualifications as Eunice Goodward's husband taken solidly, but why dwell upon them when it was just the particular distinction of his engagement that it had the intensity, the spiritual extension which was supposed to put it out of reach of material considerations. Even Ellen had done better by him than this.

He was forced, however, to come back to the substance of Mrs. Lessing's comment a few days later when he was being dined at the club by a twice-removed cousin of the Goodward's, the upright, elderly symbol of the male sanction which was the most that his fiancée's fatherless condition could furnish forth. The man was cordial enough; he was even prepared to find Peter likable; but even more on that account to measure his relation to Miss Goodward in terms of its being a "good thing."

"It's not, you know," his host couldn't forebear to remind him, "exactly the sort of a marriage we expected of Eunice; but if the girl is satisfied ——"

"If I hadn't satisfied myself on that point ——" Peter reminded him in his turn.

"Quite so, quite so . . . girls have notions sometimes; one never quite knows . . . You'll keep on with your — just *what* is it you do such tremendous things with; one hears of course that you *do* do them ——"

"Real estate, brokerage," Peter enlightened him. "I shall certainly keep on with it.

Isn't one supposed to have all the more need of it when there's an establishment to keep up?"

The symbol waved a deprecating hand. "You'll find it rather an occupation to keep up with Eunice, I'm thinking. I've a notion she'll go it, once she has the chance."

"If by going it, you mean going out a great deal, seeing the world and having it in to see her, well, why shouldn't she, so long as I have the price?" He could only take it good-naturedly. It was amusing when you came to think of it, that a man who would contribute to the sum of his wife's future perhaps, the price of a silver tea salver, should so hold him to account for it. Nevertheless the talk left a faint savour of dryness. It was part of his new pride in himself as a possession of hers that he should in all things come up to the measure of men, but the one thing which should justify his being so ticketed and set aside by them as the Provider, the Footer-up of Accounts, was the assurance which only she could give, of his being the one thing, good or bad, which could be made to answer for her happiness.

Walking home by the river to avoid as far

as possible the baked, oven-smelling streets, he was aware how strangely the whole earth ached for her. He was here walking, as he had been since his first seeing her, at the core of a great light and harmony, and walking alone in it. If just loving her had been sufficient occupation for his brief courtship, for the present it failed him. For he was not only alone but lonely. He saw her swept aside by the calculating crowd — strange that Ellen and Clarice should be a part of it — not only out of reach of his live passion, but beyond all speech. Alone in his room he felt suddenly faint for the want of her. He turned off the light with which he had first flooded it, for the flare of the street came feebly in through the summer leafage, and sat sensing the need of her as a thing to be handled and measured, a benumbing, suffocating presence. As he sat, a sound of music floated by, and a thin pencil of light from a pleasure barge on the river flitted from window to window, travelling the gilt line of a picture-frame and the dark block of a picture that hung over his bed. And as it touched in passing the high ramping figure of a knight in armour, the

old magic worked. He felt himself flung as it were across great distances, and dizzy with the turn, to her side. He was there to maintain in the face of all worldly reckoning, the excluding, spiritual quality of their relation. The more his engagement to Eunice Goodward failed of being the usual, the expected thing, the more authority it derived for its supernal sources. It took the colour of true romance from its unlikelihood. Peter turned on the light, and drawing paper to him, began to write.

"Lovely Lady," the letter began, and as if the words had been an incantation, the room was full and palpitating with his stored-up dreams. They came waking and crowding to fill out the measure of his unconsummated passion, and they had all one face and one likeness. Late, late he was still going on with it. . . .

"And so," he wrote, "I have come to the part of the story that was not in the picture, that I never knew. The dragon is slain and the knight has just begun to understand that the Princess for whom it was done is still a Princess; and though you have fought and bled for them, princesses must be approached humbly. And

he did not know in the least how to go about it for in all his life the knight could never have spoken to one before. You have to think of that when you think of him at all, and of how he must stand even with his heart at her feet, hardly daring to so much as call her attention to it. For though he knows very well that it is quite enough to hope for and more than he deserves, to be able to spend his whole life serving her, love, great love such as one may have for princesses, aches, aches, my dear, and needs a comforting touch sometimes and a word of recognition to make it beat more steadily and more serviceably for every day."

He went out that night to post his letter when it was done, for though there was not time for an answer to it, he was going down to her on Saturday, he liked to think of it running before him as a torch to light the way which, even while he slept, he was so happily traversing. He was quite trembling with the journey he had come, when on Saturday she met him, floating in summer draperies and holding out a slim ringed hand, and a cool cheek to glance past his lips like a swallow.

"You had my letter, dear?"

"Such a lovely letter, Peter, I couldn't think of trying to answer it."

"Oh, it wasn't to be answered — at least not by another ——" He released her lest she should be troubled by his trembling.

"I should think not!" She was more than gracious to him. "It's a wonder to me, Peter, you never thought of writing. You have such a beautiful vocabulary." But even that did not daunt him, for he knew as soon as he had looked on her again, that loving Eunice Goodward was enough of an occupation.

V

The senior partner of Weatheral, Lessing & Co., was exactly the sort of man, when his physicians ordered him abroad for two years, with the intimation that there might even worse happen to him, to make so little fuss about it that he got four inches of type in a leading paper the morning of his departure and very little more. Lessing would certainly have been at the steamer to see him off, except for being so

much taken up with adjustments of the business made necessary by Peter's going out of it; and his sister Ellen never went out in foggy weather, seldom so far from the house in any case. Besides, she declared that if she once saw Peter disappearing down the widening water she should never be able to rid herself of the notion of his being quite overwhelmed by it, whereas if he sent on his trunks the day before, and walked quietly out in the morning with his suitcase, she could persuade herself that he had merely run down to Bloombury for a few days and would be back on Monday. And having managed his leave-taking as he did most personal matters, to please Ellen, who though she had never been credited with an imagination, seemed likely to develop one in the exigencies of getting along without Peter, he had no sense of having done anything other than to please himself. He found a man to carry his suitcase as soon as he was out of the house, and walked the whole way to the steamer; for if one has been ordered out of all activity there is still a certain satisfaction in going out on your own feet.

It was an extremely ill-considered day, wet fog drawn up to the high shouldering roofs and shrugged off, like a nervous woman's shawl. But whether it sulked over his departure or smiled on him for remembrance, would not have made any difference to Peter, who, whatever the papers said of the reason for his going abroad, knew that there would be neither shade nor shine for him, nor principalities nor powers until he had found again the House of the Shining Walls. As soon as he had bestowed his belongings in his stateroom, he went out on the side of the deck farthest from the groups of leave-taking, and stood staring down, as if he considered whether the straightest route might not lie in that direction, into the greasy, shallow hollows of the harbour water, at the very moment when the Burton Hendersons, over their very late coffee, had discovered the item of his departure.

Mrs. Henderson balanced her spoon on the edge of her cup while her husband read the paragraph aloud to her.

"You don't suppose," she said, as if it might be an interesting even if regrettable possi-

bility, "that *I*—that our affair — had anything to do with it?"

"If it did," admitted her husband, with the air of not thinking it likely, but probably served him right, "it has taken a long time to get at him. Two years, isn't it, since you threw him over for a better man?"

"Oh, I'm not so sure of your being a better man, Bertie; I liked you better ——"

Mr. Burton Henderson accepted his wife's amendment with complacency.

"I don't believe Weatheral appreciated the distinction. Men like that have a sort of money crust that prevents the ordinary perceptions from getting through to them." This illustration appeared on second thoughts so illuminating that it carried him a little further. "Perhaps that's the reason it has taken him so long to tumble after he has been hit; it has just got through to him. It would be interesting to know, though, if he is still a little in love with you."

There was a fair amount of speculation in Mr. Burton Henderson's tone that did not appear to have its seat in any apprehension.

"Just as if you rather hoped it," his wife protested.

"Well, I was only wondering if his health is so bad as the papers say — it seldom is, you know — but if he were to go off all of a sudden one of these days, whether he mightn't take it into his head now to leave you a legacy."

"I don't believe it was personal enough with Peter for that. It wasn't me he wanted so much as just to be married. And, besides, I did come down on him rather hard." Mrs. Burton Henderson smiled a little reminiscently as if she still saw herself in the process of coming down on Peter and thought rather well of it.

"Well, anyway," her husband finished, "we could have managed with a legacy."

"Yes, we do need money dreadfully, don't we, Bertie?" she sighed. "But I don't believe I had anything to do with it."

That was all very well for Mrs. Burton Henderson, but Peter's sister Ellen had a different opinion. "Peter," she had said the evening after Peter had sent his trunk out of the house and locked up his suitcase to keep her from putting anything more into it, "you're not

thinking of *her*, are you? You're not going to take that abroad with you."

"No, Ellen, I haven't thought of her for a long time except to wish her happiness. You mustn't let that worry you."

"Just the same," said Ellen, "if anything happens to you over there — if you never come back to me, I shall never forgive her."

"I shall come back. I am sorry you should feel so bitter about it."

He could not, especially now that it was gone, very well explain to Ellen about the House; for all the years that it had stood there just beyond the edge of dreams with the garden spread around it and a lovely wood before, she had never heard of it. There had been so many ways to it once, paths to it began in pictures, great towered gates of music gave upon its avenues, and if he had not spoken of it, it was because as he had made himself believe when she did come, that Eunice Goodward would come into it of first right. He could not have blamed her for not wishing to live in it — from the first he had never blamed her. He might have managed even had she pulled it about his

ears to rebuild it in some fashion, but this was the bitterest, that he knew now for a certainty there had never been any House and the certainty made him ridiculous.

It had been rather the worse that, with all the suddenness of this discovery, he had not been able to avoid the habit of setting out for it, seeking in dreams the relief of desolation in knowing that no dreams could come. As often as he heard music or saw in the soft turn of a cheek or the slender line of a wrist, what had moved him so in hers he felt himself urged forward on old trails, only to be scared from them by the apparition of himself as Eunice had evoked it from her bright surpassing surfaces, as a man unaccomplished in passion, unprovocative. All the gates to the House opened upon dreadful hollows of self-despising into which Peter fell and floundered, so that he took to going that way as little as possible, taking wide circuits about it continually in the way of business, being rather pleased with himself when at the end of two years he could no longer feel any pang of loss nor any remembering thrill of what the House had been — until he discovered that also

he could not feel some other things, the pen between his fingers and the rise of the stairs under him. He forgot Eunice Goodward, and then one day he forgot to go home after office hours, and they found him sitting still at his desk in the dark, trying to remember whether he ought to put down the blotting-pad and the paper weight on top of that, or if, on the whole, it were not better to put the paper weight, as being the heavier article, first.

It was after that the doctor told him to go as far away from his business as possible and keep on staying away.

"But if I am going to die, doctor," Peter carefully explained, "I would much rather do it in my own country."

"Ah," the doctor warned him, "that's just the difficulty. You won't die."

And that was how Peter happened to be leaning over the forward rail of an Atlantic steamer on his way to Italy, which he had chosen because the date of sailing happened to be convenient. But he knew, as he stood looking down at the surface of the water, rough-hewn by the wind, that whatever the doctor said to

Lessing, or Ellen surmised, he would get no good there except as it showed him the way to the House of the Shining Walls.

He did not remember where in the blind pointless ring through which the steamer chugged and wallowed as though it were a superior sort of water beetle and the horizon a circle of its own making, he began to get sufficiently acquainted with his fellow passengers, to understand that they were most of them going abroad in the interest of unrealized estates, and abounded in confidence. To see them forever forward and agaze at the lit shores of Spain and the Islands of Desire, roused in him the faint savour of expectation. Which, however, did not prevent him from finding Naples squalid, and Rome, where he arrived in the middle of the tourist season, too modern in a cheap, second-rate sort of way. He could remember when Rome had furnished some excellent company for the House, and suffered in the places of renown an indeterminable pang like the ache of an amputated stump. It seemed, on occasion, as if the old trails might lie down the hollow of the Forum, under the arch of that broken aqueduct,

beside the dark Volsinian mere; but when Peter arrived at any of these places he found them prepossessed by Germans gabbling out of *Baedekers*. The Sistine Chapel made the back of his neck ache and he came no nearer than seven tourists to the noble quietude of the Vatican marbles.

"I must remember," said Peter to himself, "that I am a very sick man, and crowds annoy me."

Then he went into the country and saw the gray of the olives above the springing grass, like the silver bloom on a green plum, and began to experience the pangs of recovery. He found Hadrian's Villa and the garden of the Villa d'Este, and remembered other things. He remembered the flat malachite-coloured pools, the definite, pointed cypresses and the fountain's soft incessant rain — as it had been in the House. As it *was* in the House. For he understood in Italy what was still the most bitter to know, that though it might yet be somewhere in the world, he was never to find it any more. Toward all that once had led him thither, his sense was locked and sealed. He

remembered Eunice Goodward — the fact of her—how tall she was as she walked beside him — but not how at the soft brushing of her hair as she turned, his blood had sung to her; nor all the weeks of their engagement like a morning full of wings. And he could not yet recall so much as the bare reasons for her break with him except that they had been unhappy ones.

It had been a part of a long plan that he and Eunice should have seen Italy together, but for the moment he did not wish her there. He was sure she would have been in the way of his getting something that glimmered at him from the coign of castellated walls all awash about their base with purpled shadow, that strove to say itself in intricate fine tracery of tower and shrine, and failed and fell away before the sodden quality of his mind.

So he drifted northward with the spring, and saw the anemones blowing and the bloomy violet wonder the world, suffering incredible aching intimations of the recrudescence of desire. Afterward he came to Florence, where he had heard there were pictures, and hoped to have some peace; but at Florence they were all too

busy being painted or prayed to, the remote Madonnas, the wounded Saints, the comfortable plump Venuses; the lean Christs too stupefied with candle smoke to take any account of an American gentleman in a plain business suit, who looked homely and ill and competent. Sometimes in Santa Croce or in the long gallery over the bridge, the noise of the city would remove from him and the faces would waver and lean out of their frames, as if, had the occasion allowed, they would have said the word to set him on his way. But there was always a guard about or a tourist stalking some uncatalogued prey and it never came to anything.

"What you really want," said a man at his hotel to whom he had half whimsically complained of their inarticulateness — one of those remarkable individuals who had done nothing so successfully in so many cities of Europe that he was supposed to know the exact month for doing it most delightfully in any one of them— "what you really want is Venice. It's an off season there; you'll meet nobody but Germans, and if you go about in your own gondola you needn't mind them."

So Peter went to Venice, and on the way there he met the Girl from Home.

VI

He knew at once that she was from Home, though as she sat opposite him with the fingers of her mended gloves laced under her chin and her face turned away to miss no point of the cypresses and warm, illumined walls, there was nothing to prove that any one of a hundred towns might not have produced her. Peter remembered what sort of people wore gloves like that in Bloombury — the minister's wife, the school teacher, his mother and Ellen — and was instantly sure she would not have been travelling through Italy first-class except at the instigation of the large, widowed and distrustful woman with whom she got on at Padua. This lady, also, Peter understood very well. He thought it likely she sat in rocking chairs a great deal at home and travelled to improve her mind. She had, moreover, a general air of proclaiming the unwarrantableness of railway acquaintances, which alone would have prevented Peter from

asking the girl, as he absurdly wanted to, if they had painted the new school-house yet, and if there had been much water that year in Miller's pond.

As she sat so with her round hat pushed askew by the window-glass, there was some delicate reminder about her that streaked the rich Italian landscape with vestiges of Bloomsbury.

He looked out of the window where she looked and saw the white straight-sided villas change to green-shuttered farmhouses, and fine old Roman roads lead on to Harmony. It was all there for him in its unexpectedness, as freshly touching as those reminders of his mother which he came upon occasionally where Ellen kept them laid by in lavender; as if the girl had shaken from the folds of her jacket of unmistakable Bloomsbury cut, Youth for him — his own — anybody's Youth — no limp and yellowed keepsake, but all crisply done up and ready for putting on. So sharp for the moment was his sense of accepting the invitation to put it on with her as the best possible traveller's guise, especially for seeing Venice in, that catch-

ing the speculative eye of the large lady turned upon him, he quailed sensibly. She had the air of having detected him in an attempt to establish a relation with her companion on the ground of their common youngness, and finding herself much more a match for him both in years and in respect to their common origin. Whatever passed between the two women, and something did pass wordlessly, with hardly so much substance as a look, remained there, not intrusively, but as proof that what he had been seeking was still going on in some far but attainable place. It was the first movement of an accomplished recovery, for Peter to find himself resisting the implication of his appearance in favour of what was coming to him out of the retouched, sensitive surfaces of his past.

He knew so well as he looked at the girl, what had produced her. She was leaning a little from the window in a way that brought more of her face into view, and though from where he sat Peter could have very little notion of the points of the nearing landscape, he knew by what he saw of her, that somewhere across

the low runnels in the windy reeds she had caught sight of the "sea birds' nest."

He did not on that account change his position so that he might have a glimpse of the dark hills of Arqua or the towers of Venice repeating themselves in the lustrous, spacious sea. Sitting opposite the girl, he saw in her following eyes the silver trails of water and the dim procession down them of old loves, old wars, old splendours, much better than the thin line of the landscape presented them to his weary sense. He leaned back as far as the stiff seat allowed, watching the Old World shine on her face, where the low light, striking obliquely on the water, turned it white above black shoals of weed. For the first time since his illness his mind slipped the leash of maimed desire, and as if it parted for him there beyond the window of the railway carriage, struck into the trail to the House. The walls of it rose up straight and shining, gilded purely; the windows arching to summer blueness, let in with them the smell of the wilding rose at the turn of the road and the evening clamour of the birds in Bloombury wood.

All this time Peter had been sitting in an Italian railway carriage, knee to knee with a pirate bearded Austrian Jew who gave him the greatest possible occasion for wishing the window opened, and when the jar of the checked train drew him into consciousness again, he was at a loss to know what had set him off so far until he caught sight of the girl. She was buttoning on her jacket with fingers that trembled with excitement as she constrained herself to the recapitulation of the two suitcases, the hat box and three parcels which her companion in order to have well in hand, had been alternately picking up and dropping ever since they sighted the tower of San Georgio dark against the sea streaked west.

"Two and one is three and three is six and the '*Baedeker*' and the umbrellas," said the girl. "No, I don't have to look in the address book. I have it by heart. Casa Frolli, the Zattera." Then the roar of the train split into the sharp cries of the *facchinos* that carried them forward like an explosion into Venice as it rose statelily from the rippling lustre. Around it wove the black riders with still,

communicating prows, so buoyant, so mysteriously alive and peering, like some superior sea creatures risen magically from below the frayed reflection of the station lights. Much as Peter felt that he owed to the vivid presence of the girl, his new capacity to see and feel it so as it burst upon them, he hadn't found the courage to address her. So it was with a distinct sense of deprivation that he saw her with her companion grasping the side of the gondola as if by that method to keep it afloat, disappearing down the dim water lanes in the direction of the Zattera.

VII

It was the evidence of how far he had come on the road to recovery that he was able, when he woke in his bed at the *Britania,* to allow full play to the suggestion that he had experienced nothing more than the natural reversion of age to the bright vividness of the past. "Though I didn't expect," he admitted as he lay fronting in the wide old mirrors, interminable reflections of a pillow dinted by his too-early whit-

ened head, "I really did not expect to have it begin at forty-two." Having made this concession to his acceptance of himself as a man done with youngness of any sort, he lay listening to the lip-lapping of the water and the sounds that came up from the garden just below him, the clink of cups and the women's easy laughter, and wondered what it could have been about that girl to set him dreaming of all the women who had ever interested him.

It did not occur to him then, nor in the interval in which the tang of his dream intervened between him and the full flavour of Venice, that he had not thought once of Eunice Goodward, but only of those who had touched his life without hurting it. He was so far indeed from thinking of women again as beings from whom hurts were expected to come, that he blamed himself for not having made an occasion out of their enforced companionship, for speaking to the girl in the train if he should meet her again.

"I must be twice her age," he told himself determinedly, "and no doubt she has been brought up to be respectful to her elders."

He looked out very carefully, therefore, as he drifted about the canals, for a large, widowed lady and a girl in a round hat who might have come from Bloombury, but he did not find her that day nor the next, nor the day after, and in the meantime Venice took him.

The ineffable consolation of its beauty stole upon him like the breath of its gardens, as it rose delicately from its sea station, murmurous like a shell with the whisper of joyous adventure. It was, as he told himself, a part of the sense of renewal which the girl had afforded him, that he was able to accept its incomparable charm as the evidence of the continuity of the world of youth and passion. His being able to see it so was a sort of consolation for having, by the illusive quality of his dreams, missed them both on his own account.

It was not, however, until the morning of the fourth day that it drew him as he had known in the beginning it inevitably must, to the core of Venice, where in the wide piazza full of sleepy light, the great banners dropped from their staves broad splashes of colour between the slaty droves of doves. High over the door

the gold horses of Lysippus breasted the gold air made shadowless by the approaching *temporale.* He was so far then from anything that had to do with his dream that it was not for some moments after he had turned into St. Mark's, obsessed of the sense of life unconquerable and pervading, that he began to take notice of what he saw there in the dim wonder. It was first of all the smell of stale incense and the mutter of the mass, and then as he bowed instinctively to the elevated Host, the snare of the intricate mosaic pavement; so by degrees appreciation cleared to the seductive polish of the pillars, the rows of starred candles, and beyond that to the clear gold of the walls, with all the pictures wrought flatly upon them . . . as it had been in the House!

It was some time before he was able to draw up out of his boyhood memories, so newly made a gift to him, the stray, elucidating fact of his father's early visit to this spot and the possibility of his dream having shaped itself about some unremembered account of it. He climbed up to the galleries to give himself room to that wonder of memory which had failed to pre-

serve to him any image of how his father looked, and yet had so furnished all his imagination. Which didn't make any less of a wonder of his knowing as he stood there, Peter Weatheral, of the firm of Weatheral, Lessing & Co., Real Estate Brokers, what it was all about.

"It's a picture-book of the heart of man," he concluded, and no sooner had he shaped this thought in his mind than he heard it uttered for him on the opposite side of the pillar in a voice made soft by indulgent tenderness, "Just a great picture-book." He leaned forward at the sound far enough to have a glimpse of the Girl from Home, and smiled at her.

"So you've found that out, have you?" It was not strange to find himself addressing her friendlily nor to hear her answer him.

"Just a picture-book," she repeated. "It explains so much. What the saints were to them, and the Holy Personages. Monkish tales to prey upon their superstition, we were taught. But you can see here what they really were, the wonder tales of a people, the fairy wonder and the blessed happenings come true as they do in dreams. Oh, it must have been a

good time when the saints were on the earth."

"You believe in them, then?"

"Here in San Marco, yes. But not when I am in Bloombury."

"Oh!" cried Peter, "are you really from Bloombury? I knew you were from up country but I hardly dared to hope — if you will permit me ——" He searched for his card which she accepted without looking at it.

"You are Mr. Peter Weatheral, aren't you? Mrs. Merrithew thought she recognized you yesterday."

"Is that why she glared at me so? But anyway I am obliged to her, though I haven't vestige of a recollection of her."

"She didn't suppose you had. Her husband sold you some land once. But of course everybody in Bloombury knows the Mr. Weatheral who went from there to the city and made his fortune."

"A sorry one," said Peter. "But if you are really from Bloombury why don't I remember you? I go there with Ellen every summer, and *she* knows everybody."

"Yes; she is so kind. Everybody says that.

But I'm really from Harmony. I taught the Bloombury school last year. I am Savilla Dassonville."

"Oh, I knew your father then! Now that I come to think of it, it was he who laid the foundation of my greatness," Peter smiled whimsically. "And I knew your mother; she was a very lovely lady."

He realized as the girl's eyes filled with tears, that this must have been the child at whose birth, he had heard, the mother had died. "But I suppose we mustn't talk about Bloombury in San Marco," he blamed his inadvertence, "though that doesn't seem to want talking about either. When you said that just now about its being a picture-book, I was thinking how like it was to one of those places I used to go to in my youth — you know where you go in your mind when you don't like the place where you are. So like. I used to call it the House of the Shining Walls."

"I know," she nodded, " mine is a garden."

"*Is?*" said Peter. "There's where you have the advantage of me."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, spreading her hands

toward the pictured wall and the springing domes, "isn't this the evidence that it *is* always. Let us look."

The mass was over and the crowd departing; they moved from page to page to the storied wall and identified in it the springs of a common experience.

"It's like nothing so much," said Miss Dassonville, "as the things I've seen the children make at school, with bits of coloured stone and broken china and rags of tinsel or whatever treasures, laid out in a pattern on the ground."

"Something like that," admitted Peter.

"And that's why," said Miss Dassonville, "it doesn't make me feel at *all* religious. Just —just — maternal."

It appeared by this time they had become well enough acquainted for Peter to remark that she didn't seem to feel under any obligation to experience the prescribed and traditional thrill.

"Well, I'm divided in my mind. I don't want to overlook any of the facts, and I want to give the poor imprisoned things a chance, if they have anything to say that the guide books have missed, to get it off their minds. I've always

heard that celebrities grow tired of being forever taken at their public valuation. I've got a *Baedeker* and a *Hare* and *The Stones of Venice* but I neglect them quite as much as I read them, don't you?"

They had come down into the nave and she went about stroking the fair marbles delicately as though there sprang a conscious communication from the touch. He felt his mind accomodating to the ease of hers with a movement of release. They spent so much time in the church that when they issued on the Piazza at last it was with amazement to discern that the cloud mass which an hour before had piled ethereal tones of blueness above Frauli, lit cavernously by soundless flashes, had dissolved in rain.

"And I haven't even an umbrella," explained Miss Dassonville with a real dismay.

"But I'll take you home in my gondola," it appeared to him providentially provided for this contingency; "it is here at the Piazzetta."

"Oh, have you a gondola, and is it as much of a help as people say? Mrs. Merrithew hates walking, but we didn't know if we should like it."

They whisked around the corner under the

arcade of the ducal palace, and almost before they reached the *traghetto* the shower was stayed and the sun came out on the lucent water. Peter allowed Miss Dassonville to give the direction lest she should think it a liberty of him to have noticed and remembered it, but he added something to it that caused her, as they swung out into the canal, to enter an expostulation.

"But this is not the way to the Casa Frolli!"

"It's one way; besides, it isn't raining any more, and if you are thinking of taking a gondola you ought to make a trial trip or two, and it's worth seeing how the palace looks from the canal."

The rain began again in a little while, whitening the water; the depth of it blackened to the cloud but the surface frothed like quicksilver under the steady patter. The awning was up and they were safe against a wetting, but Peter saw the girl shiver in the slight chill, and looking at her more attentively he perceived that she might recently have been ill. The likeness to her mother came out then in spite of her plainness, the hands, the eyes, the pleasant way of

smiling; it was that no doubt which had set him on the trail of his old dreams. He tried, more for the purpose of avoiding it than for any curiosity, to remember what he had ever heard of David Dassonville that would account for his daughter's teaching school when she evidently wasn't able for it, but he talked of Mrs. Merrithew.

"I must call on her," he said, "as soon as she will permit me. But tell me, what business did I do with her husband?"

"It was a mortgage — those poor McGuires, you know, were in such trouble, and you ——"

"Yes, I was always nervous about mortgages. I was bitten by one once. But dear me, I did not expect to have my youthful indiscretions coming out like this. What else did she tell you?"

The girl laughed delightedly. "Well, we did rather talk you over. She said you were such a good son. Even when you were a young man on a salary your mother had a best black silk and a second best."

"Women are the queerest!" Peter commented at large. "It was always such a com-

fort to Ellen that mother had a good silk to be buried in. Now what is there talismanic about silk?"

"It's evidence," she smiled, "and that's what women require most."

"Well, I hope Mrs. Merrithew will accept it as evidence that I am a suitable person to take you out in a gondola this evening. You haven't seen Venice by night?"

"Only as we came from the station. I'm sure she would like you to call, and I hope she will like the gondola."

"Oh, she will like it," Peter assured Miss Dassonville as he helped her out in front of the Casa Frolli; "it will remind her of a rocking chair."

Mrs. Merrithew did like the gondola; she liked everything:—the spacious dark, the scudding forms like frightened swans, the sound of singing on the water, the soft bulks of foliage that overhung them in the narrow *calle*, the soundless hatchet-faced prows that rounded on them from behind dim palaces; and she liked the gondola so much that she asked Peter "right out" what it cost him.

"We would have taken one ourselves," she explained without waiting, "only we didn't feel able to afford it. Fifty francs a week they wanted to charge us, but maybe that was because we were Americans; they think Americans can do everything over here. But I suppose you get yours cheap at the hotel?"

"Oh, much cheaper."

"How much?"

"Forty francs," hazarded Peter. "I'm sure I could get you one for that. Unless . . . if you don't mind . . ." He made [what he hadn't done yet under any circumstances, a case out of his broken health to explain how by not getting up very early and by taking some prescribed exercise, Giuseppe and the gondola had to lie unused half the mornings, which was very bad for them. . . . "So," he persuaded them, "if you would be satisfied with it for half a day, I would be very much obliged to you if you would take it . . . share and share alike." There was as much hesitation in Peter's speech as if it had really been the favour he seemed to make it, though in fact it grew out of his attempt to fashion his offer by what

he saw in the dusk of Miss Dassonville's face. "In the evenings," he finished, "we could take it turn about. There are a great many evenings when I don't go out at all."

"Me, too," consented Mrs. Merrithew cheerfully. "I get tired easy, but you and Savilla could go." The proposal appealed to her as neighbourly, and it was quite in keeping with the character of a successful business man, as he was projected on the understanding of Bloombury, to wish not to keep paying for a thing of which he had no use. "I think we might as well close with it at once, don't you, Savilla?"

"If you are sure it's only forty francs ——" Miss Dassonville was doubtful.

"Quite sure," Peter was very prompt. "You see they keep them so constantly employed at the hotel" — which seemed satisfactorily to make way for the arrangement that the gondola was to call for the two ladies the next morning.

"Giuseppe," Weatheral demanded as he stepped out of the gondola at the hotel landing, "how much do I pay you?"

"Sixty francs, *Signore.*"

Peter had no doubt the extra ten was divided between his own man and the gondolier, but he was not thinking of that.

"I have a very short memory," he said, "and I have told the *Signora* and the *Signorina* forty francs. If they ask you, you are to tell them forty francs; and listen, Beppe, every franc over that you tell them, I shall deduct from your *pourboire* when I leave, do you understand?"

"*Si, Signore.*"

VIII

A morning or two after the arrangement about the gondola Peter was leaning over the bridge of San Moise watching the sun on the copper vessels the women brought to the fountain, when his man came to him. This Luigi he had picked up at Naples for the chief excellence of his English and a certain seraphic bearing that led Peter to say to him that he would cheerfully pay a much larger wage if he could only be certain Luigi would not cheat him.

"Oh *Signore!* In Italy? *Impossible!*"

"In that case," said Peter, "if you can't be honest with me, be as honest as you can" — but he had to accept the lifted shoulders and the Raphael smile as his only security. However, Luigi had made him comfortable and as he approached him now it was without any misgiving.

"I have just seen Giuseppe and the gondola," he announced. "They are at the Palazza Rezzonico, and after that they go to San Georgio degli Sclavoni. There are pictures there."

"Oh!" said Peter.

"It is a very little way to the San Georgio," volunteered Luigi as they remained, master and man, looking down into the water in the leisurely Venetian fashion. "Across the Piazza," said Luigi, "a couple of turns, a bridge or two and there you are;" and after a long pause, "*The signore* is looking very well this morning. Exercise in the sea air is excellent for the health."

"Very," said Peter. "I shall go for a walk, I think. I shall not need you, Luigi."

Nevertheless Luigi did not lose sight of him until he was well on his way to Saint George of the Sclavoni which announced itself by the

ramping fat dragon over the door. There was the young knight riding him down as of old, and still no Princess.

"She must be somewhere on the premises," said Peter to himself. "No doubt she has preserved the traditions of her race by remaining indoors." He had not, however, accustomed his eyes to the dusk of the little room when he heard at the landing the scrape of the gondola and the voices of the women disembarking.

"If we'd known you wanted to come," explained Mrs. Merrithew heartily, "we could have brought you in the boat." That was the way she oftenest spoke of it, and other times it was the gon*d*ola.

Peter explained his old acquaintance with the charging saint and his curiosity about the lady, but when the custodian had brought a silver paper screen to gather the little light there was upon the mellow old Carpaccio, he looked upon her with a vague dissatisfaction.

"It's the same dragon and the same young man," he admitted. "I know him by the hair and by the determined expression. But I'm not sure about the young lady."

"You are looking for a fairy-tale Princess," Miss Dassonville declared, "but you have to remember that the knight didn't marry this one; he only made a Christian of her."

They came back to it again when they had looked at all the others and speculated as to whether Carpaccio knew how funny he was when he painted Saint Jerome among the brethren, and whether in the last picture he was really in heaven as Ruskin reported.

"So you think," said Peter, "she'd have been more satisfactory if the painter had thought Saint George meant to marry her?"

"More personal and convincing," the girl maintained.

"There's one in the Belle Arti that's a lot better looking to my notion," contributed Mrs. Merrithew.

"Oh, but that Princess is running away," the girl protested.

"It's what any well brought up young female would be expected to do under the circumstances," declared the elder lady; "just look at them fragments. It's enough to turn the strongest."

"It does look a sort of 'After the Battle,'" Peter admitted. "But I should like to see the other one," and he fell in very readily with Mrs. Merrithew's suggestion that he should come in the gondola with them and drop into the Academy on the way home. They found the Saint George with very little trouble and sat down on one of the red velvet divans, looking a long time at the fleeing lady.

"And you think," said Peter, "she would not have run away?"

"I think she shouldn't; when it's done for her."

"But isn't that — the running away I mean — the evidence of her being worth doing it for, of her fineness, of her superior delicacy?"

"Well," Miss Dassonville was not disposed to take it lightly, "if a woman has a right to a fineness that's bought at another's expense. They can't all run away, you know, and I can't think it right for a woman to evade the disagreeable things just because some man makes it possible."

"I believe," laughed Peter, "if you had been the Princess you would have killed the dragon

yourself. You'd have taken a little bomb up your sleeve and thrown it at him." He had to take that note to cover a confused sense he had of the conversation being more pertinent than he could at that moment remember a reason for its being.

"Oh, I've been delivered to the dragons before now," she said. "It's going on all the time." She moved a little away from the picture as if to avoid the personal issue.

"What beats me," commented Mrs. Merrithew, "is that there has to be a young lady. You'd think a likely young man, if he met one of them things, would just kill it on general principles, the same as a snake or a spider."

"Oh," said Peter, "it's chiefly because they are terrifying to young ladies that we kill them at all. Yes, there has to be a young lady." He was aware of an accession of dreariness in the certainty that in his case there never could be a young lady. But Miss Dassonville as she began to walk toward the entrance gave it another turn.

"There *is* always a young lady. The difficulty is that it must be a particular one. No

one takes any account of those who were eaten up before the Princess appeared."

"But you must grant," said Peter, with an odd sense of defending his own position, "that when one got done with a fight like that, one would be entitled to something particular."

"Oh, if it came as a reward," she laughed. "But nowadays we've reversed the process. One makes sure of the Princess first, lest when the dragon is killed she should prove to have gone away with one of the bystanders."

Something that clicked in Peter's mind led him to look sharply from one to the other of the two women. In Bloombury they had a way, he knew, of not missing any point of their neighbours' affairs, but their faces expressed no trace of an appreciation of anything in the subject being applicable to his. The flick of memory passed and left him wondering why it should be.

He caught himself looking covertly at the girl as the gondola swung into open water, to discover in her the springs of an experience such as lay at the source of his own desolation. He perceived instead under her slight appear-

ance a certain warmth and colour like a light behind a breathed-on window-pane. Illness, overwork, whatever dragon's breath had dimmed her surfaces, she gave the impression of being inwardly inexhaustibly alight and alive. Something in her leaped to the day, to the steady pacing of the gondola on the smooth water tessellated by the sun in blue and bronze and amber, to the arched and airy palaces that rose above it.

The awning was up; there was strong sun and pleasant wind: from hidden gardens they smelled the oleanders. Peter felt the faint stir of rehabilitation like the breath of passing presences.

The mood augmented in him as he drifted late that evening on the lagoon beyond the Guidecca, after the sun was gone down and the sea and the sky reflected each to each, one roseate glow like a hollow shell of pearl. Lit peaks of the Alps ranged in the upper heaven, and nearer the great dome of the Saluti signalled whitely; below them, all the islands near and far floated in twilit blueness on the flat lagoon. There was by times, a long sea swell,

and no sound but the tread of the oar behind like a woman's silken motion. It drew with it films of recollection in which his mood suspended like gossamer, a mood capable of going on independently of his idea of himself as a man cut off from those experiences, intimations of which pressed upon him everywhere by line and form and colour.

It had come back, the precious intimacy of beauty, with that fullness sitting there in the gondola, he realized with the intake of the breath to express it and the curious throbbing of the palms to grasp. He was able to identify in his bodily response to all that charged the decaying wonder of Venice with opulent personality, the source of his boyish dreams. It was no woman, he told himself, who had gone off with the bystanders while he had been engaged with the dragons of poverty and obligation, but merely the appreciations of beauty. There had never been any woman, there was never going to be. He began to plan how he should explain his discovery and the bearing of it, to Miss Dassonville. It would be a pity if she were making the same mistake about it.

He leaned back in the cushioned seat and watched the silver shine of the prow delicately peering out its way among the shadowy islands; lay so still and absorbed that he did not know which way they went nor what his gondolier inquired of him, and presently realized without surprise that the Princess was speaking to him.

He felt her first, warm and friendlily, and then he heard her laughing. He knew she was the Princess though she had no form or likeness.

"But which are you?" he whispered to the laughter.

"The right one."

"The one who stayed or the one who ran away?"

"Oh, if you don't know by this time! I have come to take you to the House."

"Are you the one who was always there?"

"The Lovely Lady; there was never any other."

"And shall I go there as I used?" asked Peter, "and be happy there?"

"You are free to go; do you not feel it?"

"Oh, here — I feel many things. I am just

beginning to understand how I came to lose the way to it."

"Are you so sure?"

"Quite." Peter's new-found certainty was strong in him. "I made the mistake of thinking that the House was the House of Love, and it is really the House of Beauty. I thought if I found the one to love, I should live in it forever. But now that I have found the way back to it I see that was a mistake."

"How did you find it?"

"Well, there is a girl here ——"

"Ah!" said the Princess.

"She is young," Peter explained; "she looks at things the way I used to, and that somehow brought me around to the starting-point again."

"I see," said the Princess; the look she turned on him was full of a strange, secret intelligence which as he returned it without knowing what it was about, afforded Peter the greatest satisfaction. "Do you know me now," she said at last, "which one I am?"

"The right one, I am sure of that."

"But which?"

"I know now," Peter answered, "but I am

certain that in the morning I shall not be able to remember."

It was true as Peter had said that the next morning he was in as much doubt as ever about the princesses. He thought he would go and have a look at them but forgot what he had come for once he had entered the spacious quiet of the Academy. Warmed still from his contact of the night before he found the pictures sentient and friendly. He found trails in them that led he knew now where, and painted waters that lapped the fore-shore of remembrance.

After an hour in which he had seen the meaning of the pictures emerge from the frontier of mysticism which he knew now for the reflection of his own unstable state, and proceed toward him by way of his intelligence, he heard the Princess say at his shoulder, at least he thought it might have been the Princess for the first word or two, until he turned and saw Miss Dassonville. She was staring at the dim old canvases patched with saints, and her eyes were tender.

"They are not really saints, you know, they

are only a sort of hieroglyphics that spell devotion. It isn't as though they had the breath of life breathed into them and could come down from their canvases as some of them do."

"Oh," he protested, "did you think of that for yourself? It was the Princess who said it to me."

"The Princess of the Dragon?"

"She came to me last night on the lagoon. It was wonderful,— the water shine and the rosy glow. I was wishing I had insisted on your coming, and all at once there was the Princess."

"The one who stayed or the one who ran away?"

"She declined to commit herself. I suppose it's one of the things a man has to find out." He experienced a great lift of his spirit in the girl's light acceptance of his whimsicality, it was the sort of thing that Eunice Goodward used to be afraid to have any one hear him say lest they should think it odd. It occurred to him as he turned and walked beside Miss Dassonville that if he had come to Italy with Eunice there might have been a great deal that she would not have liked to hear. He could

think things of that sort of her now with a queer lightness as of ease after strain, and yet not think it a merit of Miss Dassonville's so to ease him. They walked through the rooms full of the morning coolness, and let the pictures say what they would to them.

"It is strange to me," said the girl, "the reality of pictures; as if they had reached a point under the artist's hand where they became suddenly independent of him and went about saying a great deal more than he meant and perhaps more than he could understand. I am sure they must have a world of their own of picture rock and tree and stone, where they go when they are not being looked at on their canvases."

"Oh, haven't you found them, then?"

"In dreams you mean? Not in Bloomsbury; they don't get so far from home. One of these little islands I suspect, that lie so low and look so blue and airy."

"Will you go with me in the gondola to discover it?"

"To-night?"

"To-morrow." He was full of a plan to take her and Mrs. Merrithew to the Lido that same

evening to have dinner, and to come home after moonrise, to discover Venice. She agreed to that, subject to Mrs. Merrithew's consent, and they went out to find that lady at a bead shop where she spent a great many hours in a state of delightful indecision.

Mrs. Merrithew proving quite in the mood for it, they went to the Lido with an extra gondolier — Miss Dassonville had stipulated for one who could sing — and came home in time to see Venice all a-flower, with the continual slither of the gondolas about it like some slim sort of moth. They explored Saint George of the Sea Weed after that, took tea in the public gardens and had a day at Torcello. On such occasions when Peter and Mrs. Merrithew talked apart, the good lady who got on excellently with the rich Mr. Weatheral grew more than communicative on the subject of Savilla Dassonville. It was not that she talked of the girl so much nor so freely, but that she left him with the sense of her own exasperation at the whole performance. It was a thin little waif of a story as it came from Mrs. Merrithew, needing to be taken in and comforted before it would

yield even to Peter, who as a rich man had come to have a fair discernment in pitiable cases, the faint hope of a rescue. There had been, to begin with, the death of the girl's mother at her birth, followed by long years of neglect growing out of just that likeness to the beloved wife which first excited her father's aversion and afterward became the object of a jealous, insistent tenderness.

After his wife's death, Dave Dassonville had lost his grip on his property as he had on all the means of living. Later he was visited by a stringency which Mrs. Merrithew was inclined to impute to a Providence, which, however prompt it had been in the repayment of the slight to the motherless infant, had somehow failed to protect her from its consequences. Savilla's girlhood had been devoted to nursing her father to his grave, to which he had gone down panting for release; after that she had taught the village school.

The winter before, tramping through the heavy snow, she had contracted a bronchitis that had developed so alarmingly as to demand, by the authority of the local doctor, "a trip

somewhere" — "and nobody," said Mrs. Merrithew, "but me to go with her."

"Not," she added, "that I'm complainin'. Merrithew left me well off, and there's no denyin' travellin's improvin' to the mind, though at my age it's some wearin' to the body. I'm glad," she further confided to Peter at Torcello, "she takes so to Venice. It's a lot more comfortable goin' about in a gondola. At Rome, now, I nearly run my legs off."

It was later when Savilla had been kept at home by a slight indisposition from a shower that caught them unprepared, she expressed her doubt of a winter in Italy being anything more than a longer stick with which to beat a dog.

"She will have spent all her money on it, and the snow will be just as deep in Bloombury next year. There isn't anything *really* the matter with her, but she's just too fine for it. It's like seeing a clumsy person handlin' one of them spun glass things, the way I have to sit still and see Providence dealing with Savilla Dassonville. It may be sort of sacrilegious to say so, but I declare it gives me the fidgets."

It ought of course to have given Peter, seeing

the interest he took in her, a like uneasiness; but there was something in the unmitigated hardness of her situation that afforded him the sort of easement he had, inexplicably, in the plainness of her dress. His memory was not working well enough yet for him to realize that it was relief from the strain of the secondary feminity that had fluttered and allured in Eunice Goodward.

It was even more unclearly that he recognized that it had been a strain. All this time he had been forgetting her—and how completely he had forgotten her this new faculty for comparison was proof — he had still been enslaved by her appearance. It was an appearance, that of Eunice's, which he admired still in the young American women at the expensive hotels where he had put up, and admitted as the natural, the inevitable sign of an inward preciousness. But if he allowed to himself that he would never have spoken to Savilla Dassonville that day at San Marco, if she had been to the eye anything that Eunice Goodward was, he told himself it was because he was not sure from behind which of those charming ambuscades the arrows of

desolation might be shot. If he gave himself up now to the play of the girl's live fancy he did so in the security of her plainness, out of which no disturbing surprises might come. And she left him, in respect to her hard conditions, without even the excuse for an attitude. Eunice had been poor in her world, and had carried it with just that admixture of bright frankness and proud reserve which, in her world, supported such a situation with most charm. She made as much use of her difficulties as a Spanish dancer of her shawl; but Savilla Dassonville was just poor, and that was the end of it. That he got on with her so well by the simple process of talking out whatever he was most interested in, occurred to Peter as her natural limitation. It was not until they had been going out together for a week or more, in such fashion as his mending health allowed, that he had moments of realizing, in her swift appropriations of Venice, rich possibilities of the personal relations with which he believed himself forever done. Oddly it provoked in him the wish to protect, when the practical situation had left him dry and bare.

It was the evening of the *Serenata*. They were all there in the gondola, Mrs. Merrithew and the girl, with Luigi squatting by Giuseppe, not too far from the music float that sprang mysteriously from the black water in arching boughs of red and gold and pearly Aladdin's fruit. Behind them the lurking prows rustled and rocked drunkenly with the swell to which they seemed at times attentively to lean. They could make out heads crowded in the gondolas, and silver gleams of the prows as they drifted past palaces lit intermittently by a red flare that wiped out for the moment, the seastain and disfiguring patches of restoration.

They had passed the palace of Camerleigh. The jewel-fruited arbour folded and furled upon itself to pass the slow curve of the Rialto, and suddenly, Peter's attention, drawn momentarily from the music, was caught by that other bright company leaning from deserted balconies, swarming like the summer drift between the pillars of dark loggias. They were all there, knights and saints and ladies, out of print and paint and marble, and presently he

made out the Princess. She was leaning out of one of the high, floriated windows, looking down on him with pleased, secret understanding as she might have smiled from her palace walls on the festival that brought the young knight George home with the conquered dragon. It was the compressed and pregnant meaning of her gaze that drew his own upward, and it was then when the Lovely Lady turned and waved her hand at him that he felt the girl stir strangely beside him.

"How full the night is of the sense of presences," she said, "as if all the loved marbles came to life and the adored had left their canvases. I cannot think but it is so."

"Oh, I am sure of it."

She moved again with the vague restlessness of one stared upon by innumerable eyes. "How one would like to speak," she said. "They seem so near us."

There was a warm tide of that nearness rising in Peter's blood. As the music flowed out again in summer fullness, he put out his arm along the back of the seat instinctively in answer to the girl's shy turning, the natural move-

ment of their common equity in the night's unrealized wonder.

IX

"Peter! oh, Peter!"

It was dark in the room when Peter awoke, but he knew it was morning by the salt smell which he thought came into the room from the cove beyond Bloombury pastures, until he roused in his bed and knew it for the smell of the lagoons. He looked out to see the beginning of rose light on the world and understood that he was called. He did not hear the voice again but out there in the shimmering space the call awaited him. It might be the Princess.

He dressed and got down quietly into the shadowed city and waked a frowsy gondolier asleep in his gondola. They spoke softly, both of them, before the morning hush, as they swung out into the open water between the towers of San Georgio fairily dim, and the pillars of the saints; the city floated in a mist of blueness, the dome of the Saluti faintly pearled.

"*Dove, Signore?*" The gondolier feathered his oar.

"*Un giro*" — Peter waved his arm seaward; the dip of the oar had a stealthy sound in the deserted dawning. They passed the public gardens and saw the sea widen and the morning quicken. Islands swam up out of silver space, took form and colour, and there between the islands he saw the girl. She had gotten another oar from Giuseppe and stood delighting in the free motion; her sleeves were rolled up, her hat was off, her hair blew out; alive and pliant she bent to the long sweep of it, and her eyes were on the morning wonder. But when she caught sight of Peter she looked only at him and he knew that her seeing him appearing thus on the shining water was its chief and exquisite wonder, and that she did not know what he saw. The gondolier steered straight for the girl without advice; he had thought privately that the *Signore Americano* was a little mad, but he knew now with what manner of madness.

They drew close and drifted alongside. Peter did not take his eyes from the girl's eyes lest for her to look away ever so slightly from there

to his face would be to discover that he knew; and he did not know how he stood with himself toward that knowledge.

"Oh," she said breathlessly, "I wanted you — I called you — and you came! You did not know where I was and yet you came?"

"I heard you calling."

She left her oar and sat down; Peter laid his hand on the edge of her gondola and they drifted side by side.

"May I come with you?" he asked presently.

She made a little gesture, past all speech. Peter held up a hand full of silver toward his gondolier and laid it on the seat as he stepped lightly over. The man slid away from them without word or motion, and together they faced the morning. It was one thin web of rose and gold over lakes of burnished light; islands lifted in mirage, floated miraculously upon the verge of space. Behind them the mainland banked like a new created world over which waited the Hosts of the ranked Alps. Winged boats from Murano slid through the flat lagoons.

There was very little to say. Peter was aware chiefly, in what came from her to him,

of the wish to be very tender toward it, of having it in hand to support her securely above the abyss into which he felt at the least rude touch of his, she must immeasurably fall. At the best he could but keep with her there at the point of her unconsciousness by knowing the truth himself, as he felt amazingly that he did know it with all the completeness of his stripped and beggared past.

They drifted and saw the morning widen into the working-day. Market boats piled with fruit, fish in shining heaps, wood boats of Istria, went by with Madonna painted sails. Among the crowded goods the women sat Madonna-wise and nursed their bambini, or cherishing the recurrent hope, knitted interminably. If he wanted any evidence of what he admitted between the girl and himself it flashed out for him in the faces of the market wives, on whom labour and maternity sat not too heavily to cloud the primal radiance. It was there in their soft *Buon giorno* in the way they did not, as the gondola drew beside them, cover their fruitful breasts from her tender eyes, in the way most fall, they grasped in the high

mood of the *forestieri* a sublimity untouched by the niceties of bargaining. A man in the state of mind to which the girl's visible shine confessed, could hardly be expected to stickle at the price of the few figs and roses which served as an easy passage from the wonder of their meeting to the ground of their accustomed gay pretences. They made of Peter's purchases of fruit and flowers a market garden of their own from which they had but just come on hopeful errands. They made believe again as boats thickened like winged things in a summer garden, to be bent upon discovery, and slid with pretended caution under the great ships stationed by the Giudecca, from which they heard sailors singing. They shot with exaggerated shivers past a slim cruiser and suddenly Miss Dassonville clutched Peter by the arm.

"Oh!" she cried: "Do you see it? That little dark, impudent-looking one, and *the* flag?"

Peter saw; he was not quite, he reminded her, even in the intoxication of a morning on the lagoons with her, quite in that state where he couldn't see his country's flag when it was

pointed out to him. They came alongside with long strokes, and sniffed deliciously.

"Ah — um — um ——" said Miss Dassonville. "I know what that is. It's ham and eggs. How long since you've had a real American breakfast?"

"Not since I left the steamer," Peter confessed. "Now if I were to smell hot cakes I shouldn't be able to stand it. I should go aboard her."

Miss Dassonville saluted softly as they went under the bright banner.

" 'Oh, say can you see by the dawn's early light,' " she began to sing and immediately a large, blooming face rose through a mist of faded whisker at the prow and they saw all the coast of Maine looking down on them from the rail of the *Merrythought*.

"United States, ahoy?" it said.

They came close under and Miss Dassonville hailed in return; as soon as the captain saw her face smiling up at him he beamed on it as the women in the boats had done.

"We smelled your breakfast," she explained, and the man laughed delightedly.

"I know what kind these Dagoes give ye. Come up and have some."

Peter and the girl consulted with their eyes.

"Are you going to have hot cakes?" she demanded.

"I will if you come; darned if I don't."

"We're coming, then."

It was part of the task that Peter had set himself, to persevere for Savilla Dassonville the film of unconsciousness that lay delicately like the bloom of a rare fruit over all that was at that moment going on in her, that made him hasten as soon as Captain Dunham had announced himself, to introduce her particularly by name. To forestall in the jolly sailor the natural interpretation of their appearance together at this hour and occasion, he had to lend himself to the only other reasonable surmise. If they were not, as he saw it on the tip of the good captain's tongue to propose, newly married, they were in a hopeful way to be. The consciousness of himself as accessory to so delightful an arrangement passed from the captain to Peter with almost the obviousness

of a wink, as he surrendered himself to the charm of the girl's ethereal excitement.

He understood perfectly that his not being able to feel more of a drop from the pregnant mystery of her call and his high response to it, to the homely incident of breakfast, was due to Miss Dassonville's obliviousness of its being one. It was for her, in fact, no drop at all but rather as if they had pulled out for a moment into this little shoal of neighbourly interest and comfortable food, the better to look back at the perfect wonder of it, as from the deck of the *Merrythought* toward the fair front of the ducal palace and the blue domes of St. Mark's behind the rearing lion.

Although he had parted from her that morning with no hint of an arrangement for a next meeting, it had become a part of the day's performance for Peter to call for the two ladies in the afternoon, so much so that his own sense of the unusualness of finally letting the gondola go off without him, and his particular wish at this juncture not to mark his intercourse with any unusualness, led him to send off with it as many roses as Luigi could find at that season

on the Piazza. Afterward, as he recalled that he had never sent flowers to Miss Dassonville before, and as he had that morning furnished her from the market boats past her protesting limitation, it was perhaps a greater emphasis to his desertion.

However, it seemed that the roses and nothing but the roses might serve as a bridge, delicate and dizzying, to support them from the realization of their situation, into which he had no intention of letting Miss Dassonville fall. He stayed in his room most of that afternoon, knowing that he was shut up with a very great matter, not able to feel it so because of the dryness of his heart, nor to think what was to be done about it because of the lightness of his brain.

It occurred to him at last that at St. Mark's there might be reflective silences and perhaps resolution. He felt it warm from the stored-up veneration of the world, and though he said to himself, as he climbed to the galleries, that it was to give himself the more room to think, he knew that it must have been in his mind all the time that the girl was there, as it was

natural she should have come to the place where they had met. Even before he caught the outline of her dress against the pillar he found himself crossing over to the organ loft the better to observe her. Knowledge reached him incredibly across the empty space, as to what, over and above the pictured saints, she faced there in the vault, lit so faintly by the shining of its golden walls. The service of the benediction going on in the church below furnished him with the figure of what came to him from her as she laid up her thoughts on an altar before that mysterious intimation of maternity which presages in right women the movement of passion. He felt himself caught up in it purely above all sense of his personal insufficiency.

Back in his hotel after dinner he found he had still to let the roses answer for him as he sat out on his balcony and realized oddly that though he had no right to go to Miss Dassonville again until he had thought out to its furthermost his relation to her, he could, incontinently, think better in her company.

It was not wholly then with surprise, since

he felt himself so much in need of some compelling touch, that he heard, after an hour of futile battling, the Princess speak to him.

She stood just beyond him in the shadow of the wistaria that went up all the front of the balcony, and called him by his name.

"Ah," said Peter "I know now who you are. You are the one who stayed."

"How did you find out?"

"Because the one who ran away was the one he would have married."

He did not look at the Princess, but he saw the shadow of her that the moon made, mixed with the lace of the wistaria leaves, tremble.

"Well," said she, "and what are you going to do about it?"

"You know then . . . ?"

"I was there on the water with you this morning. . . . It was I that showed you the way, but you had no eyes for anything."

It was the swift recurrent start of what he *had* had eyes for that kept Peter silent long enough for the Princess to have asked him

again what he was going to do about it, and then ——

"The other night — with the music — she knew that I was there?"

"Oh — she!" He was taken all at once with the completeness with which in his intimate attitude to things, Savilla did know. "She knows everything."

"What was there so different about the other one?"

"Everything . . . she was beautiful . . . she was air and fire . . . she made the earth rock under me."

"And did you go to her calling?"

"I would have risen out of death and dust at her slightest word . . . I would have followed where her feet went over all the world."

"And why did you never?"

"I suppose," said Peter, "it was because she never called."

"This one," suggested the Princess, "would be prettier if she were not so thin; and she wouldn't have to wear shirtwaists if you married her. She makes them herself, you know. Why did the other one run away?"

"That's just the difficulty. I can't remember." He wished sincerely within himself that he might; it seemed it would have served him somehow with Miss Dassonville. "I've been very ill," he apologized.

"Anyway, you'd be getting what everybody wants."

"And that is ——"

"A woman of your own . . . understanding and care . . . and children. I was in the church with you . . . you saw ——"

"But I don't want to talk about it."

"What do you want then?"

"To be the prince in a fairy tale, I suppose," Peter sighed.

"Oh, you're all of that to *her*. The half god — the unmatched wonder. When she watched your coming across the water this morning — *I* know the look that should go to a slayer of dragons. It seems to me," said the Princess severely, "it is you who are running away."

She was wise enough to leave him with that view of it though it was not by any means

leaving him more comfortable. He tried for relief to figure himself as by the Princess' suggestion, he must seem to Savilla Dassonville. But if he was really such to her why could he not then play the Deliverer in fact, rescue her from untended illness, from meagreness and waste? Why not, in short, marry her, except for a reason — oh, there was reason enough if he could only remember it!

He heard Luigi moving softly in the room behind, and presently when the door clicked he rose and went in and taking the lamp held it high over him, turning with it fronting the huge mirror in its gilded frame. If there were a good reason why he couldn't marry Savilla Dassonville, he ought to have found it in his own lean frame, the face more drawn than was justified by his years, lined about the eyes, the hand that held the accusing lamp broadened by labours that no scrupulosity of care denied. Weatheral, of Weatheral, Lessing & Co., unaccomplished, unaccustomed. He put down the lamp heavily, leaning forward in his chair as he covered his face with his hands and groaned in them, fully remembering.

X

He had been sitting just so in his library with the lamp behind him and the hollow flare of the coals making an excellent starting place for the House which was now so near him that the mere exhibition in shop windows of the stuffs with which it was being modernly renewed, was enough to set him off for it. It was so near now, that since the announcement of their engagement in September, he had moved through all its obligations benumbed by the white, blinding flash thrown backward from its consummating moment, the moment of her cry to him, of their welding at the core of light and harmony, bounded inevitably by the approaching date of marriage. It had been, he recalled on some one of those occasions of social approval by which it appeared engagements in the Best Society proceeded, that he had sat thus, waiting until the clock ticked off the moment when he might properly join her, sat so full of the sense of her that for the instant he accepted her unannounced appearance at the darkened doorway as the mere extension of

his white-heated fancy. The next moment as she charged into the circle of the lamp he saw that the umbra of some strange electrical excitement hung about her. It fairly crackled between them as he rose hurriedly to his feet.

"You have come, Eunice! You have come ——"

But he saw well enough what she had come for. She laid the case on the table, but as she tugged impatiently at her glove, the fringe of her wrap caught the clasp of it and scattered the jewels on the cloth. She tried then to put the ring beside them, but her hand shook so that it fell and rolled upon the floor behind them. Peter picked it up quietly, but he did not offer it to her hand again.

"I have come," said Eunice, "to say what in my mother's house I was afraid of being interrupted in saying; what you must see, what my mother won't see."

"I see you are greatly excited about something!"

"I'm not, I'm not. . . . That is . . . I am, but not in the way you think," she was sharp with insistence; "that is what you and

mother always say, that I'm nervous or excited, and all the time you don't *see*."

"What is it I don't see, Eunice?"

"That I can't stand it, that I can't go on with it, that it is dreadful to me,— *dreadful!*"

"What is dreadful?"

"Everything, being engaged — being married and giving up . . ." It was fairly racked out of her by some inward torture to which he had not the key.

"Of course, Eunice, if you don't wish to be married so soon ——" Peter was all at sea. He brought a chair for her, and perceiving that he would go on standing as long as she did, she sat upon the edge of it but kept both the arms as a measure of defence. The slight act of doing something for her restored him for the moment to reality; he bent over her. "I've never wanted to hurry you, dearest —— It shall be when you say." She put up her hands suddenly with a shivering movement.

"Oh, never, never at all; never to you!"

Peter could feel that working its track of desolation inward, but the first instinctive movement of his surface was to close over the

wound. He took it as he knew he could only take it: as the explosive crisis of the virginal resistance which he remembered he had heard came to girls when marriage loomed upon them. He took a turn down the room to steady himself, praying dumbly for the right word.

"It isn't as if I didn't respect you" — she was eager in explanation, hurried and stumbling — "as if I didn't know how good you are . . . it is only, because we are so different."

"How different, Eunice?"

"Oh . . . older, I suppose." She grew quieter; it appeared on the whole they were getting on. "I care for so many things, you know — dancing — and bridge — *young* things — and you are always reading and reading. Oh! I couldn't stand it."

So it was out now. She was jealous of his books, a little. Well, he had been self-absorbed. It occurred to him dimly that the thing to have done if he had known a little more about women, had practised with them, was to have provoked her at this point to the tears which should have sealed the renewal of his claim to her. What he said was, very quietly:

"Of course I never meant, Eunice, that you shouldn't have everything you want."

"Oh," she seemed to have found a suffocating quality in his gentleness, against which she struck out with drowning gestures, "if you could only understand what it would mean to me never to have anybody I liked to talk to about things,— anybody I liked to be with all the time!" She was choked and aghast at the enormity of it.

"But I thought . . ." Peter was not able to go on with that. "Isn't there anybody you like to be with, Eunice?"

"Yes," said Eunice. "Burton Henderson."

Mutinous and bright she looked at him out of the chair with a hand on either arm of it poised for flight or defence. After an interval Peter heard his own voice out of a fog rising to the conventional utterance.

"Of course, if you have learned to love him ——"

"I've loved him all the time." She was so bent on making this clear to him that she was careless what went down before her. "From the very beginning," she said, "but he had so

little money, and mother . . . I promised you, I know, but it's not as if I ever said I loved you."

She should have spared him that! He had not put out a hand to hold her that he should be so pierced through with needless cruelty. But she was bent on clearing her skirts of him.

"Do you think," she expostulated to his stricken silence, "that if I'd cared in the least I'd have made it so easy for you? Can't you see that it was all arranged, that we *jumped* at you?" All the time she sat opposite him, thrusting swift and hard, there was no diminution of her appealing beauty, the flaming rose of her cheeks and the soft, dark flare of her hair. As if she felt how it belied at every turn the quality of her unyielding intention, her voice railed against him feverishly. "I suppose you think I'm mercenary, and I thought I was, too. You don't know how people like us *need* money sometimes. All the things we like *cost* so — all the real things. And poor mamma, she needed things; she'd never had them, and I thought that I could stand being

married to you if I could get them that way. . . . Maybe I could, you know, if you'd been different, more like us I mean. But there was such a lot you didn't understand . . . things you hadn't even heard about. I found that out as soon as we were engaged. There wasn't a thing between us; not a *thing*."

It poured scalding hot on Peter's sensitive surfaces: made sensitive by the way in which even in this hour her beauty moved him. He felt tears starting in his heart and prayed they might not come to his face. "So you see as we hadn't anything in common it would be better for us not to go on with it even" — she broke a little at this — "even if there hadn't been anybody else. You see that, don't you?" She dared him to deny it rather than begged the concession of him as she gathered herself for departure.

"I see that."

"You never really belonged to our set, you know ——" She rose now and he rose blindly with her; he hoped that she was done, but there was something still. "It hasn't been easy to go through with it. . . . Mother isn't

going to make it any easier. It's natural for her to want me to have everything that money would mean, and I thought that if you would just keep away from her . . . you owe something to Burton and me for what we've been through, I think . . . just leave it to me to manage in my own way. . . ."

"I shall never trouble you, Eunice."

He came close to her then to open the door, seeing that she was to leave him, and he saw too that she had suffered, was at the very ebb and stony bottom of emotion as she hung for the moment in the doorway searching for some winged shaft of separation that should cut her off from the remotest implication of the situation. She found at last the barbedest. All the succeeding time after he closed the door on her was marked for Peter, not by the ticked moments but by successive waves of anguish as that poisoned arrow worked its way to his secret places.

"It isn't as if I had ever loved you; I owe it to Mr. Henderson to remind you that I never said I did. . . . You know I never liked to have you kiss me."

He had in the months that succeeded to that last sight of Eunice Goodward, moments of unbearably wanting to go to her to try for a little to ease his torment in a more tender recognition of it — days when he would have taken from her, gratefully even if she had fooled him and he had seen her do it, whatever would have saved him from the certainty that never even in those first exquisite moments had she been his. The sharp edge of her young sufficiency had lopped off the right limb of his manhood. Never, even in his dreams, if life had allowed him to dream again, should he be able to see himself in any other guise than the meagre, austere front which his obligation to his mother and Ellen had obliged him to present to destiny. She had beggared him of all those aptitudes for passionate relations, by the faith in which he had kept himself inwardly alive. The capacity for loving died in him with the knowledge of not being able to be loved.

Out of the anæsthesia of exhaustion from which Italy had revived him, it rolled back upon him that by just the walled imper-

viousness that shut Eunice Goodward from the appreciation of his passion, he was prevented now from Savilla Dassonville.

XI

It was odd, then, having come to this conclusion in the middle of the night, that when he joined the ladies in the morning he should have experienced a sinking pang in not being able any longer to be sure what Miss Dassonville thought of him. There was in her manner, as she thanked him for the flowers, nothing to ruffle the surface of the bright, impersonal companionship which she had afforded him for weeks past.

The occasion which brought them together was an agreement entered into some days earlier, to go and look at palaces, and as they turned past the Saluti to the Grand Canal, he found himself wondering if there had not been a touch of fatuity in his reading of the incident of the morning before. He had gone so far in the night as to think even of leaving Venice, and saw himself now forlornly wishing for

some renewal of yesterday's mood to excuse him from the caddishness that such a flight implied.

It came out a little later, perhaps, when after traversing many high and resounding marble halls, with a great many rooms opening into one another in a way that suggested rather the avoidance of privacy than its security, they found themselves in one of those gardens of shut delight of which the exteriors of Venetian houses give so little intimation.

As she went about from bough to bough of the neglected roses, turned all inward as if they took their florescence from that still lighted human passion which had found its release and centre there, her face glowed for the moment with the colour of her quick sympathies. She turned it on him with an unconscious, tender confidence, which not to meet seemed to Peter, in that gentle enclosure full of warmth and fragrance, to assume the proportions of a betrayal.

He did meet it there as she came back to him for the last look from the marble balustrade by which they had descended, covering

her hand, there resting, lingeringly with his own. He was awakened only to the implication of this movement by the discovery that she had deeply and exquisitely blushed.

It was a further singularity in view of the conviction with which Peter had come through the night, that the mood of protectingness which the girl provoked in him should have multiplied itself in pointing out to him how many ways, if he had not made up his mind not to marry her at all, such a marriage could be made to serve its primal uses. She had turned up her cuff to trail her hand overside as they slid through the lucent water, and the pretty feminine curve of it had brought to mind what the Princess had told him of the shirt-waists she made herself. He decided that she made them very well. But she was too thin for their severity — and if he married her he would have insisted on her wearing them now and then as a tender way to prevent her suspecting that it was on their account he had thought of not marrying her. The revealed whiteness of her wrist, the intimacy of her relaxed posture, for though her mind had

played into his as freely as a child in a meadow, she had been always, as regards her person, a little prim with him, had lent to their errand of house visiting a personal note in which it was absurdly apt for them to have run across Captain Dunham of the *Merrythought* at the door of the Consulate. Mr. Weatherall had some papers which Lessing had sent him to acknowledge there, and it was a piece of the morning's performance, when he had come back from that business, to find that the meeting had taken on — from some mutual discovery of the captain's and Mrs. Merrithew's of a cousin's wife's sister who had married one of the Applegates who was a Dunham on the mother's side — quite the aspect of a family party. It came in the end to the four of them going off at Peter's invitation to have lunch together in a café overhanging the *calle*. He told himself afterward that he would not have done it if he had recalled in time the friendly seaman's romantic appreciation of the situation between himself and Miss Dassonville. He saw himself so intrigued by it that, by the time lunch was over, he felt himself in a position which to his

own sensitiveness, demanded that he must immediately leave Venice or propose to Miss Dassonville. To see the way he was going and to go on in it, had for him the fascination of the abyss. He caught himself in the act even of trying to fix Miss Dassonville's eye to include her by complicity in the beguilement of the captain, a business which she seemed to have undertaken on her own account on quite other grounds. He perceived with a kind of pride for her that she had the ways of elderly sea-going gentlemen by heart. It was something even if she had failed to charm Peter, that she shouldn't be found quite wanting in it by other men.

When they had put him back aboard of the *Merrythought* they had come to such a pitch among them all, that as the captain leaned above the rail to launch an invitation, he addressed it to Miss Dassonville, as, if not quite the giver of the feast, the mistress of the situation.

"When are you coming to lunch with me?" demanded the captain.

"Never!" declared Miss Dassonville. "It would be quite out of the question to have hot

cakes for luncheon, and I absolutely refuse to come for anything less."

"There's something quite as good," asserted the captain, "that I'll bet you haven't had in as long."

"Better than hot cakes?" Miss Dassonville was skeptical.

"Pie," said the captain.

"Oh, *Pie!*" in mock ecstasy. "Well, I'd come for pie," and with that they parted.

Peter had plenty of time for considering where he found himself that afternoon, for the ladies were bent on a shopping expedition on which they had rather pointedly given him to understand he was not expected to attend. He had tried that once, and had hit upon the excellent device, in face of the outrageous prices proposed by the dealers, of having them settle upon what they would like and sending Luigi back to bargain for it. All of which would have gone very well if Mrs. Merrithew, in the delight of his amazing success, had not gone back to the shop the next day to duplicate his purchases. Peter had never heard what occurred on that occasion, but he had noticed that they never talked in his

presence of buying anything again. Bloomsbury people, he should have remembered, had perfectly definite notions about having things done for them.

He walked, therefore, on this afternoon in the Public Gardens and tried to reconstruct in their original force the reasons for his not marrying Savilla Dassonville. They had come upon him overwhelmingly in the recrudescence of memory, reasons rooted very simply in his man's hunger for the lift, the dizzying eminence of desire. He liked the girl well enough but he did not want her as he had wanted Eunice Goodward, as he wanted expansively at this moment to want something, somebody — who was not Eunice — he was perfectly clear on this point — but should be in a measure all she stood for to him. He had renewed in the night, though in so short a time, not less acutely, all the wounded misery of what Eunice had forced upon him. He was there between the dark and dawn, and here again in the cool of the garden, to taste the full bitterness of the conviction that he was not good enough to be loved. He was not to be helped

from that by the thought, which came hurrying on the heels of the other, that Savilla Dassonville loved him. He had a moment of almost hating her as she seemed to plead with him, by no motion of her own he was obliged to confess for those raptures, leaping fires, winged rushes, which should have been his portion of their situation.

He hated her for the certainty that if he went away now quietly without saying anything, it would be to visit on her undeservedly all that had come to him from Eunice. For she would know; she would not, as he had been, be blind to the point of requiring the spoken word. If he left her now it would be to the unavoidable knowledge that, as the Princess had said of him, he would be running away. He would be running from the evidences of a moneyless, self-abnegating youth, from the plain surfaces of efficiency and womanliness, not hedged about and enfolded, but pushed to the extremity of its use. He had, however, when he had taken that in from every side, the grace to be ashamed of it.

He was ashamed, too, of finding himself at

their next meeting involved in a wordless appeal to be helped from his state to some larger grounds. If the girl had but appealed to him he could have done with a fine generosity what he felt was beyond him to invite. He could have married Savilla Dassonville to be kind to her; what he didn't enjoy was putting it on a basis of her being kind to him.

Miss Dassonville, however, afforded him no help beyond the negative one of not talking too much and taking perhaps a shade less interest in Venice. They had two quiet days together in which it was evident, whatever Peter settled with himself as to his relation to the girl, it had taken on for Mrs. Merrithew the pointedness known in Bloombury as "attentions." She paid in to the possibilities of the situation the tribute of her absence for long sessions in which, so far as Peter could discover, the situation rather fell to the ground. It began to appear that he had missed as he was doomed with women, the crucial instant, and was to come out of this as of other encounters, empty. And then quite suddenly the girl put out a hand to him.

It was along about the end of the afternoon they had come out of the church of Saint George the Greater, which as being most accessible had been left to the latter end of their explorations. Mrs. Merrithew had just sent Giuseppe back for a shawl which she had dropped in the cloister. They sat rocking in the gondola looking toward the fairy arcade of the ducal palace and the pillars of the saints, and suddenly Miss Dassonville spoke to excuse her quietness.

"I must look all I can," she said; "we are leaving the day after to-morrow."

If she had retired behind Mrs. Merrithew's comfortable breadth in order to deliver her shot the more effectively, she missed seeing how plumply it landed in the midst of Peter's defences and scattered them.

"Leaving Venice?" he said. "Leaving me?" It took a moment for that fact, dropping the depth of his indecision, to show him where he stood. "But I thought you understood," he protested, "that I wanted you to stay . . . to stay with me. . . ." He leaned across Mrs. Merrithew's broad lap in a great fear of

not being sufficiently plain. "Make her understand," he said, "that I want her to stay always."

"I guess," said Mrs. Merrithew, a dry smile twinkling in the placidity of her countenance, "you'd better take me right home first, and then you can explain to her yourself."

XII

"And you are sure," asked Peter, "that you are not going to mind my being so much older?"

"Oh, I'm going to mind it: There will be times when I shall be afraid of not living up to it. But the most part of my minding will be, since you are so much better acquainted with life than I am, that in any matter in which we shouldn't agree I shall be so much the more sure of your being right. It's going to be a great help to us, having something like that to go by."

"Oh," said Peter, "you put it very prettily, my dear."

He was aware as soon as he had said it, that she would have a way always of putting

things prettily, and that not for the sake of any prettiness, but because it was so intrinsically she saw them. It would make everything much simpler that she was always sufficiently to be believed.

"It isn't, you know," she went on, "as if I should have continually to prop up my confidence with my affection as I might with a man of less experience. Oh!" she threw out her arms with a beautiful upward motion, "you give me so much room, Peter."

"Well, more than I would give you at this moment if we were not in a gondola on a public highway!"

He amazed himself at the felicity with which during the three days of their engagement he had been able to take that note with her, still more at the entertainment of her shy response. It gave him a new and enlarged perception of himself as a man acquainted with passion. All that had been withheld from him, by the mere experience of missing, he was able to bestow with largesse. The witchery and charm that had been done on him, he worked — if he were but to put his arm about her now, to draw her

so that her head rested on his shoulder, with a certain pressure, he could feel all her being flower delicately to that beguilement. He had promised himself, when he had her promise, that she should never miss anything, and he had a certain male satisfaction in being able to make good. What he did now, in deference to their being as they were in the full light of day and the plying traffic, was to say:

"Then if I were to put it to you in the light of my superior experience, that I considered it best for us to be married right away, I shouldn't expect you to contradict me."

"Oh, Peter!"

"We can't keep Mrs. Merrithew on forever, you know," he suggested, "and we've such a lot to do — there's Greece and Egypt and the Holy Land ——"

"But can we — be married in Venice, I mean?"

"That," said Peter, "is what I'm waiting your permission to find out."

He spent the greater part of the afternoon at that business without, however, getting satisfaction. "Marriage in Italy," the consul told him,

"is a sort of world-without-end affair. Even if you cable for the necessary papers it will be a matter of a month or six weeks before the ceremony could be accomplished. You'll do better to go to Switzerland with the young lady."

For the present he went back to her with a list of the required certificates, and another item which he brought out later as a corrective for the disappointment for the first.

"My birth and baptismal certificates? I haven't any," said Miss Dassonville, "and I don't believe you have either; and I don't want to go to Switzerland."

"No," said Peter, "even that takes three weeks."

"Why can't he marry us himself — the consul, I mean? I thought wherever the flag went up was territory of the United States."

"If you will come along with me in the morning we can ask him," Peter suggested, and on the way there he loosed for her benefit the second item of his yesterday's discovery. They slid past the façade of a certain palace and she kissed the tip of her finger to it lightly. "It's as if we had a secret between us," she ex-

plained, "the secret of the garden. Besides, I shall always love it because it was there I first suspected that you — cared. When did you begin to care, Peter?"

"Since before I can remember. Would you like to live in it?"

"In this palace? Here in Venice?"

"It's for rent," he told her; "the consul has it."

"But could we afford it?"

"Well," said Peter, "if you like it so much, at the rate things are here, we can pull it up by the roots and take it back to Bloombury."

They lost themselves in absurd speculations as to the probable effect on the villagers of that, and so failed to take note as their gondola nosed into the green shadow under the consulate, of the *Merrythought's* launch athwart the landing, until the captain himself hailed them.

"This port," he declared, "is under embargo. I have been waiting here since half tide and there's nothing doing. Somebody's in there chewing red tape, but I don't calculate to let anybody else have a turn at it until I get my bit wound up an' tied in a knot. Now don't tell me you've got business in there?"

"We want to find out something."

"Well, when ye find it, it won't be what ye want," asserted the captain gloomily. "It never is in these Dago countries." He motioned his own boat aside from the landing. "If ye want to go inside and set on a chair," he suggested, "I'll not hender ye. I like the water best myself. I hope your business will stand waiting."

"To everybody but ourselves," said Peter. "You see," he caught the permission lightly from Miss Dassonville's eyes, "we want to get married."

"Ho!" said the captain, chirking up. "I could 'a' told ye that the fust time I laid eyes on ye. But I'll tell ye this: ye can't do nothing in a hurry in this country. The only place where a man can do things up as soon as he thinks of 'em is on the blue water. We don't have red tape on shipboard, I can tell you. The skipper's the law and the government."

"Could you marry people?"

"Well, I ain't to say in the habit of it, but it's the law that I could."

"Then if we get tangled up with the consul,"

said Peter, "we'll have to fall back on you," and they took it as an excellent piece of fooling which they were later to come back to as a matter of serious resort.

"Of course," said the consul, "I could marry you and it would be legal if you chose to count it so at home, but if you are thinking of taking a house here and of making an extended residence I shouldn't advise it. As to Captain Dunham's suggestion, it's not wholly a bad one. Not being in Italy, the Italians can't take exception to it, and if it is properly witnessed and recorded at home it ought to stand."

They couldn't of course take it in all at once that they were simply to sail out there into the ethereal blueness and to come back from it with the right to live together. However, it made for a great unanimity of opinion as they talked it over on the way home, that, since so much was lacking from Peter's marriage that he had dreamed went to it, and so much more had come into Savilla's than she had dared to imagine, it mattered very little what else was added or left out.

"I suppose," suggested Miss Dassonville, "Mrs. Merrithew will think it dreadful." But as it turned out Mrs. Merrithew thought very well of it.

"On a United States boat with a United States minister — there is one here I've found out — it seems a lot safer than to trust to these foreign ways. If you was to be married in Italian I should never be certain you wouldn't wake up some morning and find yourself not married. And then how should I feel!" As to the palace plan, she threw herself into it with heavy alacrity. "I s'pose I've got to see you through," she said, "and it will give me something to think about. I don't suppose you have any intention that way, but an engaged couple isn't very good company."

It transpired that the *Merrythought* would put out to the high seas on the twenty-second, and it was in the flutter of their practical adjustments to meet this date that Peter found the ten days of his engagement move so swiftly; to engage servants, to interview tradespeople, to prune the neglected garden — it was Savilla's notion that they should do this themselves

— all the stir of domestic life made so many points of advantage to support him above that dryness of despair from which he had moments of feeling himself all too hardly rescued. He had come up out of it sufficiently by the help that Italy afforded, to glimpse once more the country of his dreams, only by this act of his marriage to turn his back on it forever. Savilla Dassonville was a dear little thing; if it came to that, a revered and valued thing, but she was not, he had never pretended it, the Lovely Lady, and the door that shut them in as man and wife was to shut *her* forever out of his life. And yet though this was his accepted, his official position, it was remarkable even to himself how much less frequently as the preparations for his marriage went forward, he found himself obliged to fall back upon it; how much more he projected himself into his future as the adored and protecting male. He recalled in this connection that the Princess had said to him that he should visit his House no more, and it was part of the proof of the notion he entertained toward himself as a man done with the imaginative life, that he accepted it with no more fuss

about it. He had in fact his mind's eye on a piece of ground which Lessing could buy for him, on the river, an hour from the city, where he could manage for Savilla at least, a generous substitute for dreams, and a situation for himself for which he began to discover more appetite than he would have believed. It was likely, he thought, that he would himself take a turn at planning the garden.

It was very early in the morning when the wedding party which had been reinforced by the consul, the mistress of Casa Frolli, and the minister, who had turned out to be exactly of Mrs. Merrithew's persuasion, went aboard the *Merrythought*, blooming out amazingly in bunting and roses for the occasion. The morning blueness had drained out from the city and stained the waters eastward as they put out between the red and yellow sails of the fishing fleet. They saw the cypress-towered islands of romance melt in the morning haze. The steam launch which was to take them ashore again ploughed alongside, and there was a pleasant sort of home smell from the cook's quarters.

Peter sat forward with the bride's hand tucked under his arm and presently he heard her laughing softly, delightedly.

"Peter, do you know what that is, that good smell I mean?"

"What do you think it is?"

"It's pie baking. Truly, don't you think I'm enough of a housewife to know that?"

"I know you're everything you ought to be."

"It is pie, there's no doubt about it, but we must pretend to be awfully surprised when the captain brings it out. But Peter, don't you like it?"

"Pie, my dear?"

"No, but like having everything so homey and — and — so genuine at our wedding?"

"I hope," said Peter, "it's genuine pie, but I see what you mean, my dear."

"It's an omen, almost, that we'll always have the good, comfortable, common things to fall back upon, if our marriage should not prove quite all we've dreamed it. It's been so perfect up to now; it must drop down out of the clouds some time."

It seemed rather to have taken a sweep up-

ward when, with sails swelling over them and the beat of the sea under the bows, they stood up to be married, and to exhibit capacities of sustaining itself at a level from which not the very soggy and sallow complexioned pie with the cook grinning behind it, could dislodge the two most concerned in it. It wore through the day to a contained and quiet gayety at a dinner which took place in the *ristoranta* over the water where they had once lunched with the captain, and lasted until Peter had brought his wife home again to the refurnished palace. It had gone, as he told himself, remarkably well, with every intimation, as he had time to tell himself in his last hours in the garden with his cigar, of going much better, of becoming as the place gave him occasion to indulge the figure, an enclosed and fragrant garden, in which if no flaming angel of desire kept the gate for him, he had at least the promise of refreshment.

That old passion for Eunice Goodward, all his feelings for all the women he had known, served to show him what Savilla had meant when she said he "gave her so much room" — the renewed sense of the spaciousness of life.

It would be there for his wife at the completest, and if she had, as it seemed, turned him out of the Wonderful House in order to live in it herself, he at least kept the gates. And was not this the proper business for a man? He recalled what the Princess had said to him so long ago when he had first begun to think of himself as a bachelor. "It takes a lot of dreaming to bring one like me to pass." Well, he had dreamed and he had slain some dragons. Later there would be children playing in the House, daughters perhaps . . . Lovely Ladies. The world would be a better place for them to walk about in because of all that he had lost and been.

When he went into the garden he had half expected that the Princess would speak to him; the place was full of hints of her, faint and persuasive as the scent of the flowers in the dark, little riffles of his pulse, flushed surfaces, the tingling of his palms which announced her, but she did not speak. He said to himself that he was now a well man and had seen the last of her. Never before had he felt so very well.

He saw the light moving in the palace behind him as his wife moved to complete some of her arrangements; he heard her then pacing along the marble floor of the great hall which went quite through the middle of it — she must be going to her room, and in a little while he would go in to her — he heard the light tapping of her feet and then he saw her come, the lit lamp in her hand.

She had on still the white dress in which she had been married, and over it she had thrown the silver-woven scarf which had been one of his first gifts to her, and as she came the light glittered on it; it drew from the polished walls bright reflections in which, amid the gilded frames, he saw the dim old pictures start and waver — and as he saw her coming so, Peter threw away his cigar and gripped suddenly at the balustrade to steady him where he stood, against what out of some far spring of his youth rushed upon him, as he saw her come — as he had always seen her, as he knew now he was to see her always — his wife and the Lovely Lady.

THE END

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